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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



TO HIS HORROR KENNETH SAW THE CRIMSON LIFE BLOOD FLOWING FROM A WOUND IN MAHEL CLIVE'S SIDE.

HIS BRAVE RESOLVE.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

I SUPPOSE I may as well go as they have asked me, but it's a dreadful nuisance."

The speaker was a singularly handsome man of eight or nine and twenty, tall and stately, with curling brown hair, eyes of an intensely dark blue, and refined, clearly cut features; his was a very attractive face.

No wonder the inhabitants of Templeton welcomed Mr. West very warmly to their midst, and deemed themselves very fortunate he had chosen their pretty village as his head-quarters during his sketching tour in Monmouthshire.

Mr. West was an artist, but—so it had been rumoured—was by no means dependent upon his profession; this fact, joined to his good looks, had made more than one matron very hospitably inclined towards him; little parties were given in his honour, excursions planned on purpose to show

him the lions of the neighbourhood, and if there was a hidden meaning in all this goodwill, it more than one mamma believed her daughter just suited for his wife, Kenneth never showed that he suspected it. He accepted the invitations, he made himself universally agreeable; but he was quite free from any ulterior object in lingering at Templeton. He had not the slightest intention of falling in love with any of the young ladies whose mammae were so kind to him.

He had come to the village to sketch, and when he had filled his portfolio, he would probably turn his back on it without a regret.

It was a lovely September day when he made the remark with which our story opens, and he was engaged to accompany the Drummonds to the ruins of an old castle some twenty miles distant.

The Drummonds were amongst his most fervent admirers; their father was the village doctor, but their mother was very ambitious for her girls, and had quite decided that Mr. West had been sent by Providence specially to marry one of them.

Kenneth met his hostess and her party at the railway-station as had been agreed upon.

The fair sex predominated greatly; the doctor's

patients had been unable to spare him, but his assistant, a tall bony young man of Scotch extraction, was there to help take care of the ladies, who numbered Mrs. Drummond, her three grown-up daughters, and two short-frocked damsels, whose governess, a meek, depressed-looking girl, was in charge of them.

What a laughing and talking went on when Mr. West appeared. Mrs. Drummond welcomed him with effusion, then she dropped back that he might pair off with Sybil, her eldest hope, whose blue eyes and flaxen hair she believed to be his destiny.

Mr. Sawbones, the assistant, made himself agreeable to the other ladies, and Ella Clifford tried in vain to reduce her charges to something like tranquillity.

She was about eighteen, a slight, delicate-looking girl, whose sole claim to beauty consisted in a pair of soft, expressive brown eyes. But for these she would have been hopelessly plain; as it was, in her shabby brown dress, her face pale and depressed, her whole manner timid and frightened, very few would have given her a second glance.

She was a niece of Dr. Drummond's first wife, and, consequently, neither kith nor kin to his

second helpmate, who regarded her as a burden and did not think her perpetual needlework, her never-ending duties as nursery governess and lady's companion, an equivalent for the little attic and grudgingly-bestowed board accorded her.

To Kenneth West their treatment of this girl was the greatest blot on the Drummonds' gentility, the one thing which showed their pettiness.

Nothing could have been more auspicious than the commencement of the picnic; the weather was lovely; Mr. West devoted himself gallantly to Sybil; the ruins were thoroughly explored; they boiled their kettle gipsy fashion in the castle yard, and enjoyed their tea all the more in consequence.

Everything had gone off without a flaw, and Mr. Sawbones was industriously packing up the china and remains of the provisions, when it suddenly occurred to Mrs. Drummond that patient Cinderella was absent from her rightful duties.

Inquiries were made at once. No one seemed very positive of Miss Clifford's whereabouts until Nancy recollected she had seen her on the other side of the bridge sketching.

"Sketching indeed," said the mother, contemptuously; "why she never had a drawing-lesson in her life."

Mr. Sawbones had now finished packing up, and proposed that they should start for the station, which was about half an hour's walk.

"It will never do to miss that train," he reminded them, "for it is the last to-night."

"The last!" exclaimed the artist. "Do you mean there is nothing from here after eight o'clock?"

"Nothing at all."

"What a stupid place!"

It was past seven then, the sun was sinking, and his last rays bathed the beautiful ruins in a kind of ruddy splendour. Kenneth, like a true artist, was almost lost in the loveliness of the scene, when Sybil's voice roused him.

"What is to become of that silly child, mamma! We can't leave her here all night."

"It would serve her right," said Mrs. Drummond, discontentedly; "but I suppose your father would blame us. Nancy, go and find your cousin, and tell her to come back at once."

But Miss Nancy averred she was tired, and showed every intention of screaming if compelled to do her mother's errand, and the time was passing—there was none to lose.

"If you will tell me in which direction I shall find Miss Clifford, I will go and fetch her."

Mrs. Drummond did not look best pleased, but no one else seemed disposed to go, so, planning a good scolding for Ella when she did appear, she accepted the artist's offer.

Nancy pointed out the way she had seen her cousin take, and then, as the others set out for the station, Kenneth plunged into the narrow footpath which led through the wood to the rustic bridge, a strange pity at his heart for the neglected girl he had gone to seek.

He soon found her seated on the trunk of a tree, her shabby hat had fallen to the ground, and she was sketching with almost feverish eagerness. So absorbed was she that she never heard his footsteps. He was close beside her before she saw him.

"I am commissioned to escort you to the railway-station, Miss Clifford. Your aunt and the others have gone on."

He had hardly spoken when they heard a low distant rumbling; then it grew louder and louder, nearer and nearer.

"It is thunder," cried Ella in fright, crouching down behind the fallen tree as a vivid flash of lightning swept across the sky. Very gently Mr. West raised her.

"Nothing is more dangerous than to stand near a tree. We are going to have a storm, get behind me."

And a storm they had, terrific peals of thunder well spiced with flashes of forked lightning and showers of drenching rain.

Ella stood as a creature stunned by fright. Kenneth took one of her ice-cold hands in his, and tried to soothe her by kind encouraging words. He forgot all about the train, but even if he had remembered it how could he have taken the poor girl through such a storm. He wrapped

his own mackintosh round her, and did what he could to shield her from the violence of the elements.

"It will soon be over," he said, cheerfully, "the best of such a storm as this is, it cannot last long; see, it is lighter already."

And in less than ten minutes from then the sky had cleared, the lightning ceased, and only the drops from the trees and the rumbling of the thunder at a greater distance told of the storm that had been.

"Now," said Kenneth, "we must make the best of our way to the station; your aunt will be anxious about you."

"I hope she will not be angry."

"Angry," and Kenneth laughed. "It is not your fault, child; you could not foresee that a storm was coming on. Can you walk a little quicker, I begin to feel afraid of losing the train. Do you remember at what time it left?"

But Ella had never even heard; the least important member of the party, it was little likely she should be included in the discussions and consultations of arrangement.

A strange uneasiness had seized on Kenneth. What if they missed the train, and it really was the last from the little rustic station, in what an inconvenient predicament they would find themselves!

"Nonsense," said the young man to himself, trying to dispel his fears; "why if worst came to worst we could drive, twenty miles is nothing dreadful, and there must be some sort of conveyance to be had."

He said nothing to his companion of his doubts; if they were unfounded it would be cruel to alarm her needlessly, indeed he felt she had undergone enough already in the exposure to the storm; the little hand that rested on his arm was motionless, the small feet dragged wearily at his side; his little charge was fairly tired out.

"And no wonder," thought Kenneth, angrily, "they make her do more work than a nurse and lady's maid combined, and never give her a kind word in return. What she stays for I can't make out; I should think it would be pleasanter to beg one's bread than have it dealt out to one after such a grudging fashion."

They had reached the station at last; whatever happened, his suspense would be over in a minute. The platform was perfectly dark, and there was no trace of a human being about; one thing was evident, the Drummonds had gone; but still Mr. Sawbones was not infallible, there might be another train out of Harley that night.

He put his trembling charge on one of the rustic benches, and went to unearth one of the missing officials; there was a little cottage near which he took to be the station-master's, and in another moment he found himself talking to that dignitary.

"When's the next train to Templeton?"

"No more trains out of Harley to-night, sir."

Kenneth could have stamped his foot with impatience.

"I wanted to catch the eight o'clock; the rest of our party have gone on by it, I suppose!"

"It's past nine, sir," in a tone of incredulity. Railway people may pity you if you lose a train by five minutes, but when it comes to being more than an hour late their faith in and their sympathy for you vanishes like magic.

"Where's the next station? I suppose we shall have to walk on to it."

The station-master shook his head.

"There's no train on the line from here to Templeton, sir; it's only a local line for the tourists and such likes."

"Can I have a carriage?"

"Not such a thing in the place, sir; you might have got a cart perhaps any other time, but the few horses there are'll be wanted for the market to-morrow; they'll have to be starting from here at five."

"But what on earth am I to do?"

"Well," said the station-master, philosophically, "I can't see what you can do, sir, but stay here all night, unless you feel inclined to

walk it. You won't get any legs but your own to take you to Templeton to-night."

"How far is it?"

"A matter of twenty miles, and it's across country. I doubt if you'd find your way."

"It's impossible," cried Kenneth, half savagely, "and I have a—a young lady with me."

Then and there he registered a mental vow never to go to another picnic party, then and there he resolved never again to volunteer to escort a young lady to a railway-station, but neither of these resolutions, though excellent in their way, afforded him much help in the passing difficulty.

"A young lady," repeated the station-master, in a tone of great surprise, "that's awkward."

"I suppose there's an inn here?"

"Nothing for three miles."

Kenneth's despair grew greater at each word.

"What are we to do?" he asked, at last, fairly driven to confide his troubles to the station-master; "even if I could sit on the platform all night, there is the young lady!"

"And you are both wet through from the storm, most likely!"

"Yes, drenched to the skin."

"Well, sir, my wife is no end of a hand at an emergency; you'd better come straight in with me and see if she can make up a bed for you."

"So that you can give the young lady a room. I don't matter."

The man went back with him to the platform, carrying a lantern.

Ella was still on the seat where Kenneth had left her.

He went up and put one hand on her shoulder.

"I am afraid there is nothing before us but to spend the night here. I—Good heavens!" he broke off as the light fell on her face, "she doesn't hear me, she's fainted."

"We'd better take her right indoors, sir," said the station-master, at last roused to pity.

He took the slight burden up in his strong arms and bore her to his own door.

A pretty, bright young woman came to open it, and he explained the case briefly to her.

She threw open the door of their little sitting-room where they had been at supper when disturbed by Kenneth's first summons; with many exclamations of pity, she helped her husband to put poor Ella on the couch; then, as she gently removed the girl's wet jacket, she said, cheerfully,—

"You'd better go and change your wet things too, sir. My husband can lend you a suit; they'll be dry, if nothing else. I'll see to your good lady."

It was only when arrayed in the station-master's Sunday clothes that Kenneth succeeded in making Mr. Johnson understand that Ella was not his wife and not his sister, in fact, only a stranger, whom he had met three times at most.

The station-master was sensible enough to understand the awkwardness of the position.

"Poor young lady," he said, feelingly; "it's a bad plight for both of you. But you say her friends live at Templeton, then they'll know your story about the trains is true; if they doubt it, you send them here to me."

He pressed some supper on his impromptu guest, and then the two men sat down to smoke before the kitchen fire. Mrs. Johnson came in presently to say she had put the poor young lady to bed, and the parlour sofa was ready for the gentleman.

"I suppose you'll go to Templeton by the first train to-morrow, sir?"

"Yes. When is it?"

"Leaves here nine-thirty. You'll see and have a bit of breakfast ready for them, Mary, if I'm not here."

Kenneth had never in his whole life spent such a night as he passed on Mrs. Johnson's sofa.

What he should say to the Drummonds he had no idea. He knew that to an unprejudiced mind no breath of blame could attach itself to

Ella or himself; he knew that they were simply the unfortunate victims of an accident; but on the other hand, Mrs. Drummond hated her husband's hapless niece. He had seen enough of the family to know that every action of Ella's life was harshly judged; hitherto they had affected to think most highly of himself, had courted and flattered him in every possible manner, but yet he could not feel sure of their reception of him the next day.

He did not see Ella until the minute before the train started.

Mrs. Johnson reported she was so tired she had better have her breakfast upstairs. Both the station-master and his wife refused to receive anything for their hospitality, and as he shook hands with them, Kenneth knew that both their thoughts were busy with what awaited him at Templeton.

Mr. Johnson put the luckless pair into the only first-class carriage on the train, and considerably locked the door. He felt some sort of discussion must take place between them, and felt it would be something if they were free from intruders.

The two began their journey in a dull, oppressive silence, only when it was about half over Kenneth moved a trifle nearer to Miss Clifford, and said, kindly,—

"I fear you have had a very trying time."

"They were very kind to me. Oh! Mr. West!"—her distress finding words—"what will my uncle and aunt say?"

"They can say nothing to you, the fault, if any, is mine, and yet I cannot think I ought to have taken you through that storm."

"Do you know what I have been wishing?"

"No."

"It is very wicked, but I cannot help it. Oh! Mr. West, if only the lightning had struck me last night it would have ended all my troubles."

"Nonsense," said Kenneth, almost roughly. "What business has a child like you to wish for death? You have all your life before you. Perhaps when you are a middle-aged lady, and I am a white-haired old man, we may meet and laugh over our adventures."

But she was past comforting, and his light tone almost jarred upon her; she trembled so when they got out at Templeton Station that she could hardly walk the short distance to the doctor's house.

"Would you rather I saw them first?" asked Kenneth, gently. "Would you like to wait here while I talk to your uncle?"

She murmured "Yes," so he left her sitting in the little waiting-room, and went on alone. It seemed to him he would have given a year from his life to have been spared that meeting with the Drummonds; hitherto he had only seen the doctor's wife when she was all smiles and amiability towards him, he had a kind of instinct she would be very different now.

Even the parlourmaid seemed impressed with his enormities, for she received him with an air of chilling dignity, and ushered him straight into the doctor's study.

He was left there alone so long that he began to think the husband and wife were having a consultation as to how he was to be received. At last they both came in together.

The interview was very short, Dr. and Mrs. Drummond absolutely refused to receive Miss Clifford back again; they coolly washed their hands of her, and at the same time politely declined the pleasure of Mr. West's society for the future.

No explanations, no entreaties, and for the poor girl's safety Kenneth descended now to these, would move them.

If the doctor might have relented alone, in his wife's presence he was firm; from that day forward Miss Clifford would be a stranger to them.

"What is to become of her?" asked Kenneth, bitterly. "What do you expect a child like her to do?"

But they replied that was not their concern. She had repaid all their kindness by the blackest ingratitude, she had been the malignant enemy of her cousin Sybil (Kenneth understood they meant she had rivalled that young lady in his

affections), and they wished to have nothing more to do with her.

At last he saw that it was useless, that he was only wasting time and breath. He went to his hotel tossed his few possessions into a portmanteau, and then, hailing a fly, drove rapidly back to the station, where Ella met him with a look of mute despairing anguish.

"Are they very angry?"

How he broke it to her he never knew; perhaps her woman's instinct guessed something of the truth and so helped him. When he had finished, he said cheerfully,—

"We are fellow-sufferers in disgrace. At least you must allow me to escort you to other relations more liberal-minded than the Drummonds."

She shook her head.

"I have no others."

"Friends then—you must have friends."

"I have not a friend in the world," and then, as though ashamed of her confession, the poor girl put her head back on the old leather sofa, and wept as though her heart would break.

CHAPTER II.

KENNETH WEST paced up and down the little waiting room with hasty restless strides. He could see but one way out of the difficulty, and that he was loth to adopt, for it seemed to him that it might blight his whole life; but he came of a noble, generous race, he was the very soul of chivalrous honour.

He could not leave this helpless girl to the mercy of the cold cruel world. If one of them must be sacrificed, better that it was he.

So he stopped his walk abruptly in front of her, and taking her cold hand in his, he said, simply,—

"My dear, there is nothing for it but for us to be married. You have no home, no friends to go to. I have no relations," and he hesitated, "to whom I could take you. We are both the victims of a cruel mistake. All I can do for you is to give you my name, and to do my best to make you happy."

The girl raised her eyes to his face. Their expression touched him; it was like the mute, imploring gaze of some helpless dumb animal.

"I do not see why I should trouble you."

"It is no trouble," he answered, gravely; "at least, it is better than the consciousness that I have made you homeless. Are you willing to trust your future in my hands?"

"Do you really wish to marry me?"

"I want you to be my wife. It is the only title that can protect you from slander."

He was the only person who had ever spoken kindly to her; he was noble, chivalrous, handsome; can you judge her harshly if she accepted his sacrifice? She put her hand in his, and committed her young life to his keeping.

She thought—Heaven help her—poor girl in her innocent unconsciousness, that after the ceremony on which he laid such stress, they would have a little home together, a home where the one study of her life would be to please him; where she would never rest until she won his love, and made him bless the day that brought them together. A friend, a defender, a companion, a protector, that was what she expected to receive through the ceremony.

Alas! his meaning was far different.

He took tickets for London, he placed her in the carriage with every care for her comfort; he bought books for her to read and provided fruit, in case she felt thirsty, but he never spoke to her.

He buried himself in a newspaper, and never addressed her until the train slowly steamed into Paddington Station.

"Are you very tired?"

It was half-past six by this time, and she had been travelling since early morning, but such is the power of excitement, she seemed to feel no fatigue, and answered that she was not in the least tired; he seemed pleased, and directed the cabman to drive to Westbourne-grove. They stopped at a large emporium for ready-made

clothing, and in a few well-chosen sentences, Kenneth explained that the young lady required a complete outfit at once.

Ella was taken into some mysterious inner room, and felt almost like a lay model, so many garments were tried on! one busy assistant folded and packed as the other directed, and in half-an-hour Miss Clifford was back at her lover's (if) side in the cab, a substantial wardrobe reposing in a neat tin box on the roof of the same cab.

They drove to a small hotel near the Strand, where Mr. West interviewed the landlady, and confided poor shivering Ella to her special care.

"Won't you stay?" pleaded the girl, wistfully, as he rose to take leave.

"It is better not. I will come and see you to-morrow morning, and explain what arrangements I have made."

Every day for nearly a week he came to see her, and took her for a drive in the almost deserted London parks, and, at last, there came a day when the drive was longer than usual, and the carriage stopped before an old village church, where a clergyman in his white surplice stood waiting for them.

A very short ceremony, barely half-an-hour, and they were back again, man and wife.

"The sacrifice is complete," mused Kenneth, bitterly. "I have paid dearly enough for a summer holiday."

"He never kissed me, he never said one loving word," thought the poor young bride, tearfully.

They went back to the hotel and dined there. When the waiter had withdrawn, Kenneth sat down opposite his wife.

"I shall be glad of a little conversation with you," he began, abruptly. "In the first place, where would you like to live?"

"I do not mind at all," she answered, blushing, "wherever you please."

"It has nothing to do with me. I am going abroad almost immediately."

A strange light broke upon her.

"Do you mean I am to live anywhere alone?"

"You are rather too young for that. I married you that I might have a right to provide you with a home without comment or scandal."

"Shall you be gone long?"

"I do not know; but that has nothing to do with it. You shall never be troubled with the vows you have taken this morning. It would be folly after such a wedding as ours to expect we could live together like other people."

"Would it?"

"Of course it would; we should end by hating each other. Now about your future. Perhaps as you are still so young, the best thing would be for you to spend two or three years at a really good school."

To his surprise she caught at the idea.

"I should like that very much. I am so stupid," flushing. "I know so little."

"There is plenty of time before you. I will find a school this afternoon and instal you in it to-morrow. Poor child," he said, in a gentler tone, "this is a strange wedding-day for you."

And it never dawned on him that her heart was yearning for a word of tenderness, that even as he spoke she was longing to throw herself into his arms and implore him to try to love her just a little.

He made his researches in a cool, business-like manner, and he found a first-rate school at Richmond, overlooking the Thames, where the number was strictly limited and select.

He found himself in a new dilemma when he saw the lady principal; he could not tell her the pupil he came about was his wife. He mentioned her as a "young lady left in his care," and the schoolmistress not unnaturally concluded he was her guardian.

Kenneth went on to say he would place a sum of money in the London and County Bank on which Miss Stone could draw as she required it. He begged she would spare no expense, and that every comfort and luxury should be accorded Miss Clifford, who was to be what is termed a parlour boarder.

When he saw his wife the next day he found

her sitting by the fire playing with her wedding-ring, which was too large for her girlish finger.

Very simply he told her of the arrangements he had made, and hinted gently that as he had spoken of her as Miss Clifford the ring had better not be worn.

She listened almost in silence; Kenneth thought she barely heeded his words. Presently she asked,—

"And you are going abroad?"

"To-night, probably. I have nothing to detain me after I have escorted you to Richmond."

So their parting was in Miss Stone's stiff, formal drawing-room; the principal, according to custom, retired for a few minutes while the adieux were spoken, then Ella gathered all her courage, she put one hand timidly on her husband's arm,—

"Shall you write to me?"

"I think not. I shall be moving from place to place, and you see in reality we are almost strangers. My letters could give you but little pleasure. I hope you will be well and happy, and make great progress in your studies."

She did not answer him; she could not. She felt like the similes in the Bible, she was crying out for bread and he was offering her a stone. Her poor starved heart yearned for one word of tenderness or affection, and he was offering her cool, friendly good wishes.

"I wonder if I shall ever see you again?"

"Of course you will," he said, cheerfully. "I shall look you up when I come back. I expect I shall find you a grand young lady by that time, intensely clever, and versed in all the dogies. Good bye, child; if anything goes wrong with you, or you want anything I can do for you, be sure and write. Miss Stone knows where letters will find me."

And with a careless handshake he was gone, and the poor child flung herself on her knees and burst into a fit of sobbing.

She had married him and he cared nothing for her—less than nothing; for all time they two would be bound to each other, and already the tie shackled him.

With her hands clasped, her beautiful eyes raised to Heaven, the lonely deserted girl-wife registered a solemn oath—her whole life, her talents, her struggles, should be devoted to one sacred aim, winning her husband's love; until she had done that she would bear up, no matter what trials came; she would go through any suffering, bear any humiliation, so that in the end she might feel his arms round her and lay her lips to his; and then she turned to see Miss Stone waiting to conduct her to the schoolroom.

CHAPTER III.

AN old country seat somewhere in the heart of Blackshire, a beautiful mansion standing in picturesque grounds, such was the ancestral home of the Vernons, a family who had received their patent of nobility from the conqueror of Agincourt, and traced their ancestors back to the Norman invasion.

The Countess sat in her boudoir on a bleak December day, talking to her only daughter, the Lady Muriel West.

"Kenneth is coming to-day!"

"Yes, what a time he has been away; it must be six months since he went off on that sketching tour, and we have heard hardly anything of him since."

Lady Vernon sighed, she loved her daughter dearly, yet her affection for Muriel was as nothing to her tenderness for her only son.

"Do you think Beatrice had anything to do with it?" she asked, almost sadly. "Bee is very bright and lovable. I always fancied Kenneth cared for her."

The door opened and a girl entered, a girl dressed in ruby satin, trimmed with soft flimsy lace; she knelt down by Lady Vernon's sofa.

"Confess that I am charming, aunty."

Aunty smiled, she really could not help it.

"Is that in honour of Kenneth?"

"Certainly not in honour of Christmas-eve, if you like. I shouldn't think of dressing for

Kenneth; to begin with, it would be lost on him; he has no eye for dress, and in the second place I am seriously displeased with him."

"How has he offended you?"

"He went away for one month, and has been gone six, then he takes to gloomy letters, and you and Muriel look so dull in consequence, I expect to see you pine away before my eyes; as though that was not enough he chooses to come home on Christmas-eve, and makes dinner two hours later in consequence."

But petulantly as the beauty spoke she accorded her cousin a warm welcome, indifferent as she had professed herself; her dark eyes wandered to his face more than once during the long stately banquet. The Earl glanced at the young couple with fond affection; he loved them both, and for years it had been a recognised wish that Kenneth should espouse his beautiful cousin.

"Ken, I want you."

The young Viscount had been at home nearly a week, the settled gravity was on his brow, the strange worn look yet on his face, but Beatrice Leigh had over him a power no other creature possessed, he never thought of refusing her imperative summons.

"What is it, Bee?"

"Come and sit in the winter garden, I want to talk to you."

But when he came and they were sitting side by side, Bee's words suddenly failed her. Kenneth had to ask again,—

"Promise not to be vexed, I am going to tell you a great piece of news, and it's a great secret."

"I am never vexed at anything you do. You may rely upon my discretion; wild horses shouldn't draw your secret from me when once I know what it is."

"I am going to be married."

He knew in his inmost heart the news could not affect his own future, that never could he offer to this beautiful girl his hand; but such is human nature, he felt vexed and disappointed; then his better self triumphed, and he said,—

"That is great news. May I ask whom I am to congratulate, Bee?"

"Me, to be sure."

"But who else?"

"Sir Hugh Ainslie. Oh, Ken, we have wanted you to come home so; everything has gone wrong—your father won't hear of it, and your mother never invites Hugh here; we hardly ever see each other."

"How dreadful! But what am I to do for you?"

"Pacify the authorities."

"I always fancied Ainslie cared for you, though he kept his secret well concealed."

"It was my wretched money," faltered Bee, blushing; "just as though that made any difference."

"Well, I'll speak to the pater; Ainslie's a good fellow, Bee. If you must take to yourself a husband, I don't know that you could have done better."

"And you don't mind?" entreatingly; "you always used to call me your little wife, Ken, and uncle and aunt took it up seriously; that's why they are so cross about Hugh; but that was only a joke, wasn't it, Ken?"

A great pain seized him; she was so beautiful, so winning, and from her babyhood he had been first to her—he had never pictured his life without Beatrice at his side.

Well, he agreed, since for all time a barrier reigned between them, it was well she had given her affections to another, and that other a good and true man; he would be the only one to suffer.

It seemed to him (Ken) that love and marriage went all wrong, and was part of one grand mistake.

"I will see my father this afternoon and ride over to call on Ainslie. You must have a speedy wedding, Bee, if you want my company, for I shall go abroad again early in February."

"Why?"

"I hate England!"

"You used not to."

"Times have changed."

"Ken, is there anything the matter? Do you know you are awfully altered; you sit sometimes for an hour together without speaking. I begin to think you must have some secret trouble."

He sighed.

"What is it, Ken?"

"You could not lighten it, Bee."

"What is it?"

"Troubles are best not spoken of."

"They are half-conquered when we confide them to other people; tell me."

"I cannot."

"Surely you can trust me!"

Her bright face was softened to a strange sweet gravity, she put one hand tenderly on his shoulder, as his sister might have done.

"I have made a great mistake, Bee. Never mention it to anyone. I have sacrificed all to a fancied code of honour, a bare chimera. I did not count the cost before, and now the sacrifice is almost more than I can bear."

No idea of his real meaning came to Bee, she understood only that he was in trouble, and she longed to comfort him.

"Things will right themselves some day."

He shook his head.

"You are much too desponding. Oh, Ken! I wish you would marry some one very, very nice. I am quite sure you would be happy then, in spite of your troubles, whatever they are."

"I shall never marry, Bee."

"You must," she cried, triumphantly. "Think of the title; you are the last of your line; if you die unmarried, the race of Vernons will be extinct."

"What a calamity!"

"It is one I shall do my best to arrest. I have a tolerable idea of your tastes, and as soon as I am settled in town, and Hugh and I are steady enough to give parties I shall never rest until I find someone just made for you, then I shall send for you, and you couldn't be so ungrateful as not to come."

Kenneth spoke to his father that afternoon, it was as he thought, the Earl and Countess had only received Sir Hugh Ainslie coldly for their son's sake.

"It is all your fault, Kenneth," cried Lord Vernon. "You should have proposed to Bee sooner; she is one-and-twenty now, and you can't blame her if she thinks it time she had a lover."

"So she has chosen such a true one as Hugh Ainslie, I don't mind."

The Earl looked keenly at his son.

"Then you are not going to wear the willow?"

"I had no intention whatever of proposing to Bee. I am unfeignedly glad she has chosen such a man as Sir Hugh."

"Well, it's very odd."

"What, father, that I don't envy another man his plighted wife?"

"No; that you could live in the same house with Beatrice for years and not love her, Ken; is there anyone else?"

For an instant Kenneth hesitated, then he said, slowly,—

"I have never seen a woman I preferred to my cousin. I do not hope to do so."

"I wish you would marry, Kenneth; I am getting an old man, I should like to see you settled before I die."

"You will live a good many years yet, I trust, father, and I am too fond of a roving life to settle down yet awhile. I mean to go to America as soon as this business is settled."

And he was as good as his word, for while Sir Hugh and Lady Ainslie were yet in the earliest stage of their honeymoon, Viscount West bade adieu to his parents and sister and sailed for the new world, frankly saying he had no idea how long it would be before he returned to England.

He had one rather hard battle with himself before he sailed; something told him he ought to go and see the poor young creature whom he had sworn to love and cherish till his life's end, yet who lived apart from him, not bearing his name, not wearing even his ring on her finger; but he had a horror of scenes; he argued it

would only upset Ella in her new abode, and disturb her progress if he paid her a visit.

"It is ridiculous thinking of her as my wife," he said to himself. "I married her that I might provide for her, and she accepted me because she was homeless. Bee herself could not find much element for romance in such a union. Dear little Bee, when she talked of my future so hopefully, she little knew the wreck I had made of it, how through my own act and deed my home must ever be a lonely one, how I have shut myself out for all time from a wife's love and children's caresses. Oh, it was a mad thing to go masquerading to Templeton as an artist, but the crowning madness of all was persuading that poor child to marry me. It may have given her a home, but it has blighted my whole life."

CHAPTER IV.

THE London season had come and gone three times since Lady Beatrice Leigh entered the honourable state of matrimony, and she was spending the early autumn at her husband's pretty estate, Normanhurst, which was barely two miles from Vernon Castle.

September had come, but the days retained a summer warmth, and Lady Beatrice wore the prettiest of white costumes, trimmed with her favourite carnation ribbons. Opposite her on a garden chair sat her favourite friend, a girl, who looked some years younger than herself, and whose sweet face, graceful manners, and winning ways, had combined to make her the darling of the season just over.

Mabel Clive was the niece and heiress of General Clive, a distinguished officer who had returned from India a year or two before.

He and his adopted daughter had made a tour of Europe, and then settled down in a charming villa in Mayfair, but just now the villa was unoccupied, for the General was visiting some old friends at Bath, and Mabel had come for a long stay with the Ainalies.

Looking at her companion as she sat in the sweet September sunshine, Bee decided that she was the very girl to make Kenneth West supremely happy.

She had never forgotten her cousin; she had seen very little of him since her marriage, for in the three and a half years he had barely spent a month in England.

His kind old father was dead now, and the Countess had retired with Muriel to the Dover House.

Vernon Castle, swept and garnished, was ready for its mistress, only Kenneth seemed too busy travelling in Africa to think about findings young lady to fill that post.

Miss Clive would do admirably, decided Bee. She was a slight, delicate-looking girl, with large velvety brown eyes, a clear wild rose bloom, a mass of soft silky hair, and the sweetest smile that ever tormented the heart of man.

A great many people had fallen captive to that smile in the last six months, the most eligible men of the day had proposed to the General's niece and been declined.

Mab was not cold or proud. She received all the attentions offered her with charming grace, but she never let any of her suitors see that she was more to her than the rest. No man who went away rejected could plead that he ever had any encouragement.

"Do you never mean to marry, Mab?" asked Lady Ainalie, suddenly.

"I think not," returned Miss Clive, demurely.

"You think not! Mab, what shocking heresy. From the beauty of the day you can't want to be an old maid."

"No," and Mab played with a diamond ring on her finger, "but I am very happy as I am."

"I have a charming plan."

"You are so fond of plans, dear," objected her friend a little. "I have known you just two years, and I am sure you have had fifty plans."

"Listen, Mab. I think it would be charming if you would marry my cousin. He is just like

you, never means to marry anyone; but I am quite sure you would suit him."

"But I don't want to suit him, Bee; uncle and I are very happy as we are."

"How dull you must have been when the General was in India, Mab."

"Yes," quietly.

"I suppose you did nothing but wish for him to come back."

"I did not even know he was there."

"What do you mean?"

"Does it sound so odd? I was brought up almost entirely by some relations of my father. Uncle Clive is my mother's only brother. He met me in the street one day and was so struck by my resemblance to his sister that he stopped me and asked my name. He took me to Paris that very night, and I have been like his own child ever since."

"Really it sounds just like a chapter out of a novel. What a romantic story, dear."

"You will never tell it to anyone," pleaded Mab. "Uncle wouldn't like it known, only we are such friends, Bee, I don't mind what I tell you. All the happiness of my life has come to me through my uncle; you can't wonder I am in no hurry to leave him."

"Well, if ever Kenneth comes home I shall introduce him to you, and see if he can induce you to change your mind."

"I particularly detest the name of Kenneth."

"Why! I think it is so pretty."

"It has unpleasant associations for me."

"Well, I have never known any Kenneth, except my cousin, and he was always dearer to me than anyone, except Hugh. Everyone thought we should be married, but we were too much brother and sister to become anything else."

"And where is this paragon?"

"In Africa just now. He is always roaming about; even before he came into the title he used to go on long sketching tours for months together. I don't suppose there is a picturesque village in England he has not visited. He used to put up at the rustic inn like any strolling painter, and call himself Mr. West."

"Why should he change his name?"

"He didn't, he only dropped his title; Viscount West would have attracted too much attention. I will show you his photograph some day. He is a handsome fellow."

"Tall or short?" Showing for her unusual interest.

"Very tall, with curly hair and dark blue eyes."

"I never trust men with blue eyes."

"Wait till you see Ken."

A servant came out then to tell her ladyship that visitors were in the drawing-room.

Mab excused herself from accompanying her hostess, and sat on in the pleasant garden. She grew tired of her solitude soon, and crossing the grounds, she went into the park thinking to meet the shooting party returning homewards.

Normanhurst was a very flourishing estate now, owing to its master's wealthy bride. Sir Hugh entertained his guests right royally, and people were always pleased to come, for it was the pleasantest house in the country at which to visit.

Screening her brow with one hand she looked down the broad walk, but saw nothing but a solitary pedestrian coming along amid a cloud of dust.

Mab lingered to discover who he was. She was on the best terms with everyone at Normanhurst, and she decidedly preferred a companion in her walk back to the house.

She stood leaning against a tree, her pale blue dress and broad brimmed hat giving her an appearance of extreme youth, a pretty picture to any weary eye, and the new-comer, although his breast was steeled against womanhood of all ages, confessed as much. He stood still at the point where the four roads diverged, not knowing which to take.

Mabel Clive saw then that it was a stranger whom she had never met at Lady Ainalie's before. One vivid crimson blush dyed her cheeks, perhaps at his assurance, as with a

courtly bow, he asked her to direct him to the house.

"You follow this winding path and keep to the right, then if you cross the pleasure grounds you will be at the garden entrance."

He expressed his thanks.

"Sir Hugh and Lady Ainalie are here, I believe!"

"Oh, yes, they came a month ago."

He paused, Mab paused too, then she said, simply,—

"I am going back to the house. Perhaps I had better show you the way."

"Thank you; I have not been here since Sir Hugh's marriage, and I find many alterations."

"Possibly."

He tried one or two subjects but with little success. The girl barely hid her indifference. He felt piqued, he was not used to such treatment from women, who had spoilt him with their favour; there was something quite new to him in his present companion's manner. He found himself watching her very narrowly, once or twice; then she said, suddenly,—

"There is Lady Ainalie," and without another word, she left him to greet his hostess, and entered the house.

"Kenneth!"

"Bee!"

There were tears in her eyes, his voice shook; they had been very near to each other, and this was their first meeting after years. Bee soon recovered herself.

"You were the last person I expected to see. But I am delighted, and so will Hugh be. It is very good of you to come to us first."

"I have only been in England a week. My mother and Muriel are at Baden; I stopped there on my way to England."

"And you have come alone, Ken?"

"Yes," he said, gravely, "alone."

"I believe I am glad of it; for I shall at once set to work to provide you with a Countess."

He shook his head.

"Nonsense, she is in the house; what did you do to her to frighten her away?"

"I never frightened anyone."

"Mab was standing at your side when I first caught sight of you; then she vanished."

"Oh, was that 'Mab'?"

"Mabel Clive, my dearest friend."

"She is very pretty," absently.

"She is more than that—she is charming," said Bee, firmly; "I am quite sure you will think so."

And so the Earl of Vernon became a guest in the house of his first love.

Beatrice and her husband received him warmly; the guests—many of whom were old friends—greeted him with friendly welcome; but he had a strange sense of self-reproach as he listened to their expressions of goodwill. It seemed to him that he was acting a part—that he was deceiving one and all; he was not what they believed him, the free unfettered young nobleman, but a disappointed, saddened man, who in a moment of rashness had given his name, and bound himself for all time to a half-educated country girl, about as polished and refined, it seemed to him, as his cousin's waiting-maid.

He had heard nothing of Ella all these years.

The sum of money left at the bankers would have been ample enough for an even longer period.

He had never written to inquire whether it had been drawn upon—he had never communicated with Miss Stone as to his ward; each time he had been in England he had intended to call, but some strange disinclination held him back.

He fancied he felt his bitter mistake less at a distance; that the sight of Ella would but augment his disappointment and increase his regrets.

She was his wedded wife; he had sworn to love and cherish her, but he deemed he had fulfilled his obligations by providing Ella with a home. It never dawned on him that duty required something more.

He came to Normanhurst, meaning to stay a week; a month passed, and he still remained his cousin's guest.

The pleasant country house was more like home

to him than the grand old castle which awaited its master.

He had nothing particular to hurry him away; he said to himself at the beginning of each week that he must go, but its close found him still there, a favoured and favourite guest, popular with all about him, young and old, it seemed to him, except the girl Beatrice had called her special friend, the pretty, dainty maiden he had first seen leaning against one of the stately trees, Mabel Clive.

He never quite knew what strange attraction Mabel's face held for him. For him all thought of love or marriage were fruitless. He could never now think of giving his name to any woman, and yet Bee's few chance words haunted him.

He found his eyes perpetually wandering to the graceful girl whom Bee had declared just suited to be Countess of Vernon. She never looked him—she never seemed to see that his glance followed her every movement; that his very voice changed as he addressed her.

Kenneth thought he had guarded his secret jealously, but watchful eyes were upon him. Before he had been a fortnight at Normanhurst, Bee Ainslie was triumphing over the success of her prediction and bets were openly exchanged in the smoking-room as to the Earl's chance of winning General Clive's niece.

They saw a great deal of each other these two whom everyone had decided would go through the world so admirably together; they were paired off on all occasions; it was Kenneth's task to take Mab into dinner, to be her partner at lawn-tennis and billiards.

He never paid her a compliment, he never spoke a word to her the whole might not have heard, and yet he was madly, hopelessly in love with her, and yet he had a dull miserable certainty that when this visit was over, and they two drifted apart, his life could never be quite the same, never again.

He was an English Earl, the last of a long line of titled ancestry, he possessed an almost princely home, a grand house in London, and an income counted by its tens of thousands; he had health and strength, a long life probably stretched out before him, and his future was laid waste, his whole life made desolate by that one mistake of four years before.

"What are you thinking of so gloomily?"

The questioner was Mabel Clive; she came through the hall dressed in her warm driving costume of purple velvet trimmed with silver fox, and found the Earl leaning moodily against the wall, one hand resting on his gun, for he was but just returned from shooting.

"I hardly know," returned Lord Vernon, slowly. "I believe I was thinking life was not worth much."

"What a dreadfully morbid sentiment!"

"You always laugh at me," she said reproachfully. "Miss Clive, are you quite heartless?" and then he stopped abruptly, feeling he had no right to say any more, or, indeed, as much.

"Yes," answered Mabel, "utterly and entirely; it's astonishing, Lord Vernon, how very well I get on without that encumbrance."

"Perhaps you have given it away to some lucky man," he hazarded.

"I made up my mind before I came out that I would dispense with a heart; it's quite remarkable how easy it is when you try."

"You seem to find it so."

"I am very happy," she said, lightly.

"But you might be happier," eagerly.

"Such a suggestion comes well from you after your late fit of despondency. Well, my lord, pray what method have you thought of for increasing my felicity?"

She stood close to him, the firelight falling on her bright hair and sweet upturned face; they were quite alone, almost everyone else had gone to dinner; her cold, repellent manner had flown, she was indescribably sweet and winning; it came to poor Kenneth like a rush of mingled joy and pain that had he only been free to ask for her love he should not have had to ask in vain.

"Well," she said, simply, "I tell you I am happy, and you assert philosophically I might be happier. I have a natural thirst for information, & want to know how."

He looked straight into her eyes.

"No one is really happy without love."

He expected some cutting rejoinder, but to his surprise none came. The beautiful eyes drooped beneath his gaze; for just an instant she stood there motionless at his side, then she sped away.

He never forgot her that evening; she looked like some fair vision of the night in her soft white drapery. A little knot of men gathered round her in the drawing-room after dinner, but Kenneth made no attempt to join them, he stood apart gloomy and in silence. Lady Ainslie came up to him in laughing reproach.

"Have you quarrelled with Mab?"

"No."

"You have quite deserted her."

He muttered something about a pack of simpletons.

"You are not very polite to my guests," said Bee, with charming good humour, "but I will forgive you since you have fallen in so entirely with my plans, Ken," putting one white hand on his shoulder; "confess the truth, you are a hopeless victim to the little god's archery, and what is more you have taken the disease very badly indeed."

"Do you set up for an authority, Bee?"

"Perhaps. Seriously, Ken, I have something to ask you: you know you have planned a shooting party on your grounds next week; well, I want to drive over the same day, and have a sort of picnic at the Castle. I was always a favourite with Mrs. Ball. I am quite sure she will pardon the intrusion of six or seven hungry people if you will."

"I shall be delighted. May I cry off the shooting party to play the host, Bee?"

"Certainly not, we shall have plenty to do in looking over the house and pictures. Mab is an artist, she will glory in the Castle picture gallery."

An insane longing came over the Earl that Mab's own picture might hang there some day as Lady Vernon, but he said nothing, only promised to write to his housekeeper.

"We are all going to Vernon next Tuesday," announced Bee, coming into Mabel's room, as the maid was brushing out her long soft hair.

"What for?"

"To see the house and pictures." Then as the maid discreetly retired, Bee bent over and kissed her favourite. "It is my own old home, you know, dear, you can't think how glad I am it is to be yours."

"But it isn't, dear."

"Have you refused Kenneth?"

"Bee!" indignantly.

"Well, have you?"

"He has never given me the opportunity."

"You are the most extraordinary couple I ever heard of in my life."

"You have said as much as that before."

"Well, you have been together a whole month. Anyone can see Kenneth is head over heels in love with you."

"Is he, really," asked Mab, quickly. "Beatrice, to be serious for once, do you think really that your cousin cares for me—like that?"

"I am certain of it; you must be blind if you can't see it. Ken is hopelessly in love—and, Mab, I think even you are not quite heart-whole. I have been very good to you both. I have given you dozens of opportunities; why don't you settle something?"

"Settle what?"

"Everything. I should say Ken has had time enough to make twenty proposals."

"One would be quite enough."

"Well, things must come to a crisis soon; the day at Vernon will decide matters."

"Must I really go?"

"Of course you must. What on earth would people think if you refused? Besides, it's a lovely place; I could quite understand any girl marrying Ken only to be mistress of Vernon Castle."

"I wouldn't," said Mab, simply. "To me he seems made to be loved for himself alone—a king among men if only he were not so hard and cold."

"Hard and cold!" cried Lady Ainslie, throwing up her hands, "what next? My dear, if

you would give Ken one grain of encouragement you would find him anything but cold."

The day fixed for the picnic came at last, as bright an autumnal morning as the heart of sportsman or excursionist could desire. The party all assembled in the large hall; guns, keepers, dogs, all the necessities of the sport were to be found on the Earl's estate; the carriages would convey everyone to Tangley Wood. There the ladies would drive on to the Castle, and the gentlemen commence their sport.

"Bee, I want you."

The summons came from Lady Ainslie's lord and master. He drew her into a small study opening off the hall.

"My dear, I wish you'd entice young Houghton to join your picnic; he can't refuse if you ask him."

"Whatever for?"

"He has about as much idea of shooting as your son and heir upstairs. Here I go in mortal fear of an accident, though my keepers are tolerably up to his stupidity. But what it will be at Tangley I can't make out."

Bee smiled.

"I'll do my best, but he's as obstinate as a mule; besides, he's awfully sulky just now. I sometimes fancy he has proposed to Mab and been refused."

Sir Hugh laughed.

"Whenever Miss Clive is engaged to anyone, Bee, you will lose the great occupation of your life; you are more matchmaking than any manœuvring mother."

They went down the terrace steps in the highest spirits, but in the first vagonette were, of course, Lady Ainslie and Miss Clive; and it occurred to the former that her task would be like trying to convey two wild hearts peacefully in one carriage, when she saw Lord Vernon and Sir James Houghton seat themselves opposite to her.

Sir James was Mab's devoted suitor; before the arrival of the Earl he had been regarded as likely to succeed, there was, therefore, bitter warfare between Kenneth and himself.

The looks they exchanged were black as night, and Lady Ainslie wished regretfully she could exchange one of them for the amiable girl, or sedate elderly gentleman on the box seat, that being impracticable she resigned herself to the inevitable with as much hopefulness as she could manage.

At first it was a very silent party; Mab seemed resolved to contribute nothing to the conversation, the gentlemen did nothing but stare at her, and Bee chattered desperately on about the scenery, the weather, etcetera, feeling in spite of her good nature, as if she could have shaken each one of the three soundly for giving her such a tedious drive.

At last Lord Vernon roused himself to say,—

"I hope you will find everything prepared; lunch will be in the white dining room, unless you care to come and have it with us; we shall meet at Tangley Wood by two."

Now was Bee's opportunity for heeding her husband's wishes, and she seized it boldly.

"Thanks, Ken, everything is sure to be delightful. I'll see how we feel as regards our outdoor lunch; what a party of desolate women we shall be! Sir James," brightly, "you have never seen the Castle, couldn't you spare a day from shooting to be our gallant squire?"

"I should be delighted," said Houghton, quickly; but the Earl was not going to leave a clear coast for his rival.

"In that case, Beatrice, I will cry off too. I can leave you in all confidence to play hostess of my home to ladies, but if I am to be honoured by a first visit from Sir James I must come home to receive him."

Blank silence, each busy with their own reflections. Sir James decided it would not be worth staying if the Earl was to be there too; the Earl savagely determined that his rival should not wander through the deserted rooms of the Castle with Mabel Clive at his side; clearly if one remained both would do so, and this Mab herself resolved to put a stop to.

"I am quite sure we don't want anyone, Bee," she said, quickly. "It would never do to take

Lord Vernon from the shooting party, who are as much his guests as we are."

"But I am perfectly free, Miss Clive," murmured Sir James—"free to accompany you to the world's end, if you wish it."

"I don't, thank you," said Mab, brightly. "You had better be thinking of these birds' wings you promised me. Remember I am not to be put off with what you beg, borrow, or steal, they must be your own shot."

After this, of course, it was useless to try and detain Sir James; in spite of one or two attempts from Lady Ainslie he left them at Tangle Wood, and the ladies drove on alone, a pleasant party of six or seven.

Bee was that happy creature, a woman free from nerves. She had done her best to second her husband's wishes, but having failed she never thought of making herself miserable because she had not succeeded.

Sir James had shot at Normanhurst every day for a week, he could surely manage this extra sport without shooting himself or any other animal of the human species.

So Bee gave herself up to the happiness of the hour. She wandered through the deserted rooms, and pointed out their beauties to her friends; she showed Mab the picture gallery, and whispered some pretty speech about the time when her portrait would hang side by side with those of the Ladies Vernon; and then finding it was barely one o'clock it was put to the vote and unanimously agreed that they should drive to Tangle Wood, and eat their lunch out of doors in company with the gentlemen instead of in the white dining-room with only the portraits of departed Vernons for their companions.

Another hour and the party were scattered on the soft grass near the entrance to the wood, partaking cheerfully of the good things provided for them.

It was one of the merriest luncheon parties ever known, only one thing surprised people, Sir James Houghton, usually a very good friend indeed to such things as raised pie and M&D, had not put in an appearance.

"He is hunting for my wings," put in Mab, archly, as they rose from their inopportune repast. "Poor fellow, I never meant him to lose his lunch in getting them for me."

"Would you value them so much?" asked Lord Vernon, at her elbow.

They were standing a little apart from the others, and insensibly she moved to walk towards the wood, thus increasing the distance as she answered him.

"I love all pretty things." "That remark applies to the birds, I suppose. Houghton would hardly come under such a category." (He had red hair, watery blue eyes, and freckles.)

Mab laughed, she really could not help it, though she felt extremely indignant.

"I meant the birds."

"And you could value them for his sake?"

"Possibly, he is one of my friends!"

"You have a great many friends."

"Yes, don't look so cross because I say I love pretty things. If you knew how few had blessed my childhood you would understand the intense appreciation I have for them now."

It was the first time she had ever spoken of her past life. Kenneth looked up quickly.

"I always connect you in my mind with joy and sunshine. I always supposed you had never known a sorrow."

"And yet when my uncle was in India, and I was a little lonely orphan here, many and many a time I have sobbed myself to sleep, not caring whether I ever woke or not."

"Mab!"

"It is quite true," turning an April face to him. "I don't mind thinking of it all now I am happy, but at the time it was bad enough."

"You were at school?"

"No," she said, simply, "not at school."

"What do you think of Vernon Castle?"

"It is so beautiful that I wonder you can be content to leave it to servants and caretakers from one year's end to another."

"Do you think it looks homelike? Mab, could you have ever felt at home in it?"

His love was in his eyes as he looked at her, her own drooped as she answered,—

"No stranger could do that."

She affected to take the question to apply to her as she was there—Mabel Clive. She would not see the other hidden meaning.

"My home is widely different," she went on.

"Uncle and I live in London, not merely for the season, but always. Isn't it a dreadfully unfashionable thing to do?"

"It is very comfortable. And General Clive is there now?"

"Oh, no; he is at Bath. He has been there nearly six weeks. I am expecting to hear every day. He talks of coming home."

"And then?"

"And then," speaking bravely, albeit a little tremble in her voice, "then this pleasant visit must come to a close. Uncle could not do without me at home."

She had barely finished speaking when the report of a gun fell on their ears. They could not see the shooter, but he must have been at no great distance, for they could see the smoke which followed the discharge, then the ball whizzed past, left Kenneth uninjured, but wishing from his heart it had struck him down instead of his chosen prey. Mabel Clive fell at his feet, and to his horror he saw the crimson life blood flowing from a wound in her side.

There are some moments in a man's life which stand out distinctly in his memory until life itself is over; such were these.

For one instant Kenneth stood paralyzed with agony, then he raised his precious burden in his arms, and began to walk with it back to the spot where they had lunched.

As in a dream he saw the white startled faces; as in a dream he heard Sir James Houghton's bitter self-reproaches at his luckless aim.

He realised nothing clearly until Beatrice decided that Mabel must be taken back to Normanhurst; the Castle might have been nearer, but medical aid would be prompter at Lady Ainslie's, and there would be better nursing and attention at her command than in Lord Vernon's splendid desolate home.

Lady Ainslie entered the wagonette, and they laid that still white form at her side, its head pillowed on her lap; not till then did she notice the agony on her cousin's face.

"If you were to ride on, Kenneth, you might get Dr. Bolton there as soon as we are."

He wanted no second bidding; he was off, spurring the fleetest horse to be found in the Castle stables.

Meanwhile, the others did their best to console Sir James, whose grief and remorse were almost beyond expression; he must have sunk into helpless emotion but for the wise suggestion of Sir Hugh Ainslie.

"Look here, Houghton, however matters go with that poor girl, ours will be a dull house for weeks to come; many of our guests, most in fact, were due in your house later on; if they were to go back with you to-night do you think it would give your mother a panic? I don't want to be inhospitable, but I know Normanhurst will be a dreary place for days to come."

The suggestion was caught at; the ladies resigned themselves to leave all their packing to their maids; the gentlemen decided their men were to be trusted.

One or two would gladly have stayed at Normanhurst and shared the Ainslies' anxiety, but after all Mab was not as dear to them as to Sir Hugh and Lady Ainslie, so they were easily persuaded to agree.

When Lord Vernon, after hours of hard riding, got back, he found a clear house, and Hugh Ainslie waiting in the hall to conduct the doctor to the door of the room, where his wife had already installed herself as chief nurse.

CHAPTER V.

LORD VERNON never quite knew how long he waited in the library while the doctor was

upstairs with his patient; minutes and hours seemed to him to have trebled in their length since the moment when his darling was stricken down in the pride of her youth and beauty.

"I am so happy now," she had said, poor child, little knowing of the danger approaching.

Kenneth could hardly have told what he most hoped or feared. If he had ever doubted the state of his own heart, to-day's accident had taught him to doubt no longer.

For him the world held but one woman, and that was Mabel Clive; 'twixt him and her a great gulf yawned.

Would it not be easier to lose her now, to see her go down alone into the valley of the shadow of death than to watch her recovery, and then in after years be compelled to witness her marriage with another man?

The minutes went on, and still the Earl paced up and down with hurried uneasy strides. Did he think of another September day four years before, when he had paced a far different room with just such strides?

Hardly; he had no thoughts now to give to his folly of long ago—he had no thought, no fear, no hope, save for Mabel.

Sir Hugh came in presently, calm and grave, yet with a sadness on his face which told he was not indifferent to the fair girl whom his wife loved as a sister.

"You had better come and take some dinner, Kenneth; you are doing yourself no good here."

He had known Kenneth all his life. He could never quite forget how Ken had smoothed matters for him and Bee with the old Earl; but he had generally regarded his wife's cousin as a calm, easy-going man of no extreme feelings. He saw his mistake now.

The Earl looked as if he had been ill for weeks; the thick veins stood out like cords upon his forehead, his eyes were bloodshot, and his hands trembled like an old man's.

"Indeed you had better come," persuaded Sir Hugh.

"I cannot. Leave me, Ainslie, I am no fit company for anyone to-night."

A sound fell on their ears like the opening of a door.

Kenneth looked up eagerly.

"It is only one of the servants. The doctor won't be leaving yet."

"He has been here two hours."

"Which shows he thinks there is hope. Doctors don't waste two hours over a hopeless case."

"Did he really say there was hope?"

"He has not said anything yet. I am waiting to hear his report before I telegraph to the General. Poor old man! It will half kill him if things go badly with Mab; she was the apple of his eye."

"Small wonder!"

"And you mean to rob him of her; well, Ken, I have guessed as much for some time now."

Kenneth said nothing, he only directed his eyes to the door.

"Someone is coming."

It was Lady Ainslie.

"There is hope yet," she said in her calm tone, which seemed to carry a portion of her own deep thankfulness in its every sound. "She has opened her eyes, and spoken once."

"Thank Heaven," said Kenneth, solemnly, and then the husband and wife went away together feeling that gladness such as his needed no witnessing.

But in spite of that first hopeful verdict, the anxiety was by no means over, Mab's state was so precarious that for days no fresh face was allowed in the room.

General Egerton was peremptorily forbidden by the doctors to come to his niece; they would not even let him stay at Normanhurst for fear his presence in the house might become known to her, and prove an exciting object; some injury to the head had been sustained in the fall, and Dr. Bolton and the physician summoned from Blankton feared that brain fever would intervene.

And it did.

There came a time when the light of reason

died out of those beautiful eyes; when the soft fair was cut quite short, because Mab complained that her head was so hot, and when nurses and devoted friends kept their anxious watch by her bed, expecting each hour to be her last.

The doctor told Lady Ainslie that some heavy anxiety or perplexity must have troubled her for months; the injury to her head had only developed the mischief already there, some secret cause must have disturbed Miss Clive's peace for a long time.

The wound in the side was healing fast, if they could but conquer the cruel fever which was sapping her young life, all might yet be well.

Bee was perplexed. What trouble could have worried Mab, the brightest happiest nature she had ever met?

Could she have cared for Lord Vernon more than she suspected, and have sorrowed over his carelessness as a lover?

Lady Ainslie began to think so, when in the ravings of delirium Mab would call on Kenneth to come to her, would plead with him not to be angry with her, not to look so stern; she could not go to sleep while he looked like that, and she was afraid, oh, so very tired; she must rest soon, she wanted rest so much.

Lady Ainslie listened till she could bear it no longer; then she went in search of Kenneth.

She found him in the library; he was generally to be found there now, waiting for news of Mab.

She went up to him and took his hand.

"Ken, we have been friends a long time, we are just like brother and sister, you would speak to me as easily as to Muriel!"

"More so."

"Then answer me one question. But for this accident should you have proposed to Mabel Clive. I will tell you my reason for asking you afterwards, you will forgive me then?"

"I forgive you now. I love Mabel as my own wife, Beatrice; Heaven knows I would give life itself to make her happy."

"I think that less than that would make her happy. Kenneth, she loves you; she is distracting herself by some fancy you are angry with her. I know I am proposing the most unheard of thing, but in a case of life and death one forgets conventionalities; I want you to come with me to Mab's room."

"To say farewell," and the strong man's voice shook; "is it so bad as that?"

"To say nothing of the kind, to tell her your happiness depends upon her, and she must get well for your sake."

"I cannot!"

"Don't you understand it may be the crisis in her illness; she has taken up this miserable fancy, and it is destroying all chance of her recovery. Ken, you must come."

He buried his face in his hands.

"If only she had never seen my face! If only I had died before I came here!"

"Kenneth!" said Bee, fairly frightened, "you are terrifying me, what do you mean?"

"Have you never guessed my secret?"

"Never."

"Did you not wonder, seeing how I worshipped Mabel, guessing how I loved her, did it never strike you as odd I did not ask her to be my wife?"

"Often; I thought you were afraid of risking all, and so you waited."

"I waited. Oh! Beatrice, I have no right to speak of love or marriage to any woman. I was married more than four years ago!"

"Kenneth!"

Indignation, pity, grief, dismay, were all intermingled in that one word.

"How could you do it, how could you deceive me so? You knew I meant Mab to love you. Oh, Kenneth, how could you do it!—you have wrecked her life."

And Beatrice burst into a fit of bitter weeping.

By-and-by when she grew calmer, Kenneth poured out his miserable story, he kept back nothing, he made no attempt to defend himself.

"You began well," said Bee, simply; "you sacrificed yourself nobly for that poor girl; up

to your wedding-day I see nothing to blame; but oh, Kenneth, your whole life since has been one mistake. There was no one in the world to blame you; you had doting parents who thought all you did perfection. How could you hide your secret from them, and so cruelly desert your wife!"

"I was not cruel to her, Bee, I found her as I thought a happy home."

"Happy!" repeated Bee, scornfully. "If she had a particle of pride the life you chose for her must have been torture; if you resolved on leaving her you ought to have acknowledged your wedding, and confided her to your mother's care in your absence."

"She was a half-educated country girl, she had no idea beyond a little village."

"You married her and it was your duty to care for her; she might have become a sweet gentle wife, you might have had a happy home. Look at what you have done, you are miserable yourself, your poor wife must be doubly so, and you have blighted my darling's life."

Late some evenings after, as Sir Hugh and Kenneth sat over the library fire, the Baronet said, simply,—

"Beatrice wanted me tell you that Miss Clive is so much better we hope she will be able to come downstairs next week."

Kenneth guessed Bee had told her husband all.

"And you want me gone; I understand, Ainslie, I will pack up to-morrow. I can never thank you enough for all your hospitality. I can never forget these weeks."

"I hope we shall see you here again," said Hugh. "Mabel will be leaving us in another fortnight, any time after that Bee will be pleased to welcome you—and your wife. It must come sooner or later," he continued.

"I am sure your own sense of right will tell you so, you cannot leave the Countess of Vernon at school like a half-grown child, Kenneth; I fear you won't like my saying so, but there is nothing for you but to make the best of your bargain."

"And Mab?" ventured the Earl.

"Mab will be true to herself; it cannot bring you any nearer to her that you neglect the woman you have sworn to love and cherish."

A long, long silence, the two men puffing away slowly at their Havannahs. Said the Earl putting out his hand,—

"I believe you are right, Ainslie. I shall leave your house to-morrow to go and find my wife. My home can never be what some men's homes are—what yours is—but I'll do my best for the poor girl I've married."

"And in that you'll find happiness."

He shook his head.

"I think happiness and I have parted company. One word, Ainslie; will you get your wife to explain matters to Mab—to Miss Clive! Don't let her think I played with her, let her know how I suffered."

Sir Hugh shook his head.

"Mab is too pure and innocent; the thought that a married man has stooped to love her will cause her less pain than to believe she has been the plaything of a flirt. Bee and I are both resolved that as far as our power lies, she shall never hear your name again. We are loth to hurt you, Kenneth, but we must think of Mab; whenever she is not with us we can have no more welcome guest than you, only I would give much that I hold dear to undo the work of the last two months, and give back to Mab the innocence and hope which you robbed her of."

The next morning the Earl left Normanhurst.

CHAPTER VI.

LORD VERNON left Normanhurst with a sad heart, and yet a strange peace which had not been his for four long years.

There was no longer need for him to ponder over his future course, to wage a bitter conflict between duty and inclination. He had confessed his marriage to the two people he most esteemed,

and they in their turn would reveal the secret to the girl he madly loved.

Henceforward Mabel Clive would be nothing to him but a memory and a name. He must strive to forget her and to do his duty to the neglected child the law called his wife; that very day he would go to Richmond, before he slept that night he would see Ella.

"After all, poor girl, she has been hardly done by," he thought, remorsefully; "we have both something to regret. Well, she is young still, only twenty-two, it will not be too late to try and do my duty to her."

He was kept so long waiting in the drawing-room that he became positively alarmed, and when Miss Stone came in there was little reassuring in her face.

"Can I see Miss Clifford?"

The schoolmistress stared.

"I trust there is no mistake. I wrote to you more than three years ago to relate the sad circumstances that had occurred, the letter was sent to your bankers to be forwarded to you."

"I do not understand," said Kenneth hoarsely.

"Is she dead?"

"Better if she were!"

"Pray explain yourself, madam."

"I cannot make my story a pleasant one, Mr. West; Miss Clifford left my roof one day under very suspicious circumstances; she went out and she never returned!"

"Was she discontented or unhappy?"

"I do not know that she was unhappy, she never expressed any discontent; she was the most diligent and painstaking pupil I ever had, and though I never show partiality, I may add my favourite. Apart from the unpleasantness of the affair, her loss caused me personal grief, for I was warmly attached to her."

"More than three years ago!"

"Yes. I have wondered very much that you left my letter unanswered."

"I never had it, madam!"

He could gain nothing more from Miss Stone, so he went down to the bank; the manager was perfectly polite, he remembered forwarding despatches to a Mr. West in America, but a mail steamer foundered very soon after that date, and it was probable the one which carried Miss Stone's letter.

Kenneth stood as one dumbfounded. What could have become of his poor neglected child-wife? How had she left Miss Stone's?

She had not a friend in the world, she was utterly alone; a sharp pang of remorse smote him; he seemed to hear her voice again, asking him to write to her.

She must have found the routine of school life unendurable and run away.

But this conclusion did not satisfy him; Ella had been at Richmond nearly twelve months when she disappeared, she would have grown used to Miss Stone's restraints and regulations in that time.

Lord Vernon went up to London, and though the short winter's day was closing in, he drove to the office of a firm skilled in all sorts of delicate investigation.

To the head of this firm, Mr. Thorpe, a sharp, clear-headed lawyer, he unfolded his story, and then waited in silence for the verdict.

"And you say the young lady had no relations?"

"Only some distant ones, who had positively refused to hold any more communication with her."

But Mr. Thorpe deemed it well to take down Dr. Drummond's address.

"Blood's thicker than water, my lord; I should be inclined to think the young lady has gone back to her friends. I don't think you need feel uneasy about her."

"You don't understand," said the Earl, simply. "She is my wife, Countess of Vernon. I tell you Mr. Thorpe, she must be found, if I spend half my fortune in the search. Think of my position. I cannot tell whether I am a married man or a widower!"

"Your wife. That alters the case; my opinion is very different now."

"You think——!"

"I think some accident befell her ladyship

and she is dead; no girl in the world whose only chance of rank and wealth was a reconciliation with her husband would hold herself purposely aloof for three years."

Lord Vernon gained very little by his interview; he went away with a strange remorse gnawing at his heart; it seemed to him that if any evil had befallen his wife, if in a moment of despair or unhappiness she had taken her own life, her blood was as surely on his head as though he had killed her.

He went down to Templeton himself and interviewed Mrs. Drummond, who was far too great a time-server to refuse to see an Earl. When she learned that his little neglected drudge was in very truth Countess of Vernon, she exclaimed with such astonishment that Kenneth knew her surprise was genuine.

"I have never seen her since you took her away," said Mrs. Drummond, promptly, "never once. Dear, dear, to think of Ella being a Countess! It almost takes one's breath away. She may well have money to throw away."

Kenneth caught at that, it was evident Mrs. Drummond had had some communication with her late nursery governess.

"It is only little Una," replied the doctor's wife, "my youngest child, a cripple, you know. Ella spoils her completely, till Una would hardly speak to anyone else. Well, each birthday since the child went away a handsome present has come for Una, and we have guessed of course Ella sent it, only as there was no address we could not write in reply."

At Kenneth's earnest wish Una was sent for; a child of twelve with a sweet patient face, but a hopeless cripple; he had never seen her during the month he spent at the village inn. Una was not considered ornamental or engaging by her mother, who kept her in the background.

She came, holding the presents, the four tokens of affection which had come to remind her of her lost friend: a book of fairy stories, a doll dressed in all the extravagance of Paris fashion, a box of German toys, and a paint-box.

"And you are sure these came from your cousin?" Kenneth asked her, kindly.

"Oh, yes. I could not forget Ella's writing; she was at Richmond when she sent the book."

Proof positive.

"I fancy she was a great traveller," put in Mrs. Drummond; "the doll came by railway with ever so many foreign labels on the box, and the same by the toys; the paint-box was sent through the post; London, I think the mark was."

Two facts were clear to Kenneth; his wife had been living so short a time ago as May, and she had been possessed of ample means; the gifts were selected without any regard to economy, the doll in particular must have cost pounds.

He rose to go, puzzled and distressed. Ella had asserted she had no relations in the world, no friend on earth; how then did she manage to live in luxury and send presents of such a costly nature?

He went back to London and resumed his search; he grew weary and heartsick over his investigations, and in the midst of them he received a little note from General Clive, begging for his company at dinner on a certain day.

It cost him something to refuse the invitation, but he did refuse it, pleading a prior engagement; then a few days after he met the General in the Park and the old officer would take no denial, he insisted upon the Earl accompanying him home.

"Mab will be delighted to see you; we have never forgotten your kindness the day of her accident. What an idiot young Houghton must be!"

It was a comfort to be able to assent.

"Actually wanted my consent to his marrying Mab," pursued the General, who was the simplest, most communicative old gentleman. "I told him people didn't shoot young ladies first and marry them afterwards."

"And Miss Clive?"

"Mab didn't care. I wish, to tell you the truth, she would care about something; the doctors say

there's nothing the matter with her, she's only to get strong, but it seems to me that's just what she can't do; she lays on the sofa like the ghost of herself. You come in to dinner, a little society will be good for her."

Kenneth had his own doubts of that, but the temptation was too strong for him, and excuses about his morning coat having been removed, he accompanied the General to the pretty bijou villa in Mayfair.

After all Mab did not come down to dinner; a message came that she was tired, so the General and his guest partook of it *tête-à-tête*, and as soon as it was over an old Indian friend turned up to play cribbage; clearly Kenneth's company could be dispensed with.

"But you'll go up and see Mab," cried her uncle, seeing the Earl bent on leaving. "Poor child, a little society will cheer her up."

The old Anglo-Indian saw nothing peculiar in inviting a fascinating Earl to spend half-an-hour alone with a beautiful girl; to his idea there was a great gulf between Mab and Lord Vernon, a gulf of years, I mean; he never suspected the real gulf between them.

Kenneth yielded; he went upstairs to the drawing-room floor, and a faint voice said,—

"Come in!"

He forgot everything when he was beside her but herself. Two months had passed since he bore her an unconscious burden in his arms, and she looked the mere shadow of her former self; her soft hair was cut quite short, and clustered in curls all over her small head, her hands were almost transparent, and her cheeks were very pale in spite of her becoming pink dress.

"Mabel!"

She opened her eyes and fixed them on his face with a strangely happy smile.

"You have stayed away from me a long while," she whispered, half reproachfully.

Kenneth started, could it be that his dreadful secret was yet unknown to her, he almost feared so from her manner.

"I did not stay away willingly."

"I wanted you so," pleaded the girl, pitifully; "in the worst of my illness, when they thought I was dying, I wanted Beatrice to let you come and say good-bye to me, but she would not. . . . Did you have my letter?"

(Continued on page 333.)

LEILA VANE'S BURDEN.

—10:—

CHAPTER XIII.

SIR JULIAN'S theory as to Leila's father being in close proximity to Wilton Crosbie, was proved a fact no later than the next morning.

Mrs. Sylvester was sitting in her own room writing some letters in the quiet hour that followed on breakfast, when there came a tap at her door, and in answer to her brisk summons the handle was turned slowly, and Leila entered the room.

The girl's face was very, very white—her eyes had that big dilated look which came into them in moments of great mental agitation—her small hands were clasped together; they held a letter crushed between them. Mrs. Sylvester rose at once from her chair.

"You want me, Leila, my dear?" she asked, her quick sympathy instantly aroused by the sight of the girl's most evident trouble. For answer Leila held out the letter she was carrying.

"It is from my father," she said in a low strained voice.

Mrs. Sylvester compressed her lips.

"Am I to read it dear?"

Leila nodded her head.

"If you will—and then give me your advice. I—I am so bewildered, I hardly know what I am doing," she put her hand to her head as she spoke, and brushed her hot tired eyes. She stood with her face a little averted as Mrs. Sylvester unfolded the crumpled note. There

were clusters of fresh flowers on the broad oaken mantelpiece, and the scent of the violets filled the whole atmosphere of the room. A picture of Julian Bernadine stood in a wide frame on the shelf among the flowers. If Mrs. Bernadine had been allowed to have had her way she would have studded each room in Wilton Crosbie with photographs of her boy; but Sir Julian protested strongly against this, and save for an occasional portrait he ordered them all to be put out of sight.

"As many of your dear self as you like any pretty mother, but not of me!" he had said.

Mrs. Sylvester, however, was one of those who derived a pleasure from a glimpse now and then at a picture of her young host. She had at once rescued this photograph from a dark corner of the charming rooms placed at her disposal, and set it in the most prominent spot she could find.

"I shall have my mother in a fine state of jealousy, I am afraid," she had thought to herself as she did this; "but all the same I am not going to cease caring for the boy just because his mother may be jealous!"

Leila unconsciously let her eyes rest upon the picture of Julian's grave kind face. As her eyes met the gaze of those handsome honest ones of the photograph, she shivered slightly; there came to her quite suddenly the bitter truth of the wideness of difference there was between this man and the man she called her father; of the horror Julian Bernadine must hold for such a man as Eustace Vane. She spread her hands unconsciously also to the blaze of the fire as she stood waiting for Mr. Sylvester to speak; yet she was not cold, the flame of passionate suffering within her heart seemed to spread like a fever throughout her whole being.

Margot's mother read quickly through Mr. Vane's epistle. Her lip curled with contempt as she did so.

"He is positively unique!" she said to herself. "Surely there never was so impertinent a scoundrel before in all the world as Eustace Vane!"

For Mr. Vane had written quite naturally, his letter was couched in a pleasant airy sort of fashion, telling his daughter that as it chanced he happened to be staying in the neighbourhood of Wilton Crosbie, at the very time she should be an inmate of Mrs. Bernadine's house, he should take advantage of the chance, ride over some time during the morning and pay her a visit. His real reason being no strong desire to see his child, but of obtaining an introduction to his daughter's new and wealthy friends. His termination to the note was most characteristic.

"I am exceedingly glad," he wrote, "that you have at last been able to tear yourself out of town, and I hope you will not fail to improve the occasion that has brought you in contact with people who can be of real use to you."

Mrs. Sylvester's sensation of anger and contempt against the writer of this letter melted into trust comprehension and pity for Leila's feelings.

She could not speak for the moment. It was Leila who first broke the silence.

"It—it is not possible that my father can know that I am here with you," she said hurriedly, a little catch in her breath betraying her anxiety.

Mrs. Sylvester bent forward and kissed the girl with one of her rare moments of motherly tenderness.

"Leila," she said gently. "You must cease to deceive yourself any longer about your father. He is what he has always been, selfish and unprincipled to the core—forgive me, my child, these are harsh and terrible words for you to hear; but alas! you must hear them for they are the truth; and unless you fully realise this truth, your future life will be one long story of misery and bitter pain. I have for some time past wished that you should know your father's character for what it really is—it has hurt me to the heart to see your untiring devotion to him, your unchanging faith in him. He played upon your mother's sweet nature just as he has been playing upon you, and he brought her to her grave before her time. Now," Mrs. Sylvester

said, briskly and yet very firmly. "I have no intention of allowing him to bring you to your grave before your time, hence I speak so openly to you now, and I shall have no hesitation in telling him my real opinion if he ventures to interfere with you."

"He will not do this," Leila said, dully. She smiled half-bitterly, "he—he is only too glad to be rid of me as a responsibility," she paused an instant, "but whatever he may do or not do to me—he—he must realise his proper position with you! Oh!" the girl broke down here with a sob, "Oh! how it hurts me to know it all—dear, dear friend, help me now—tell me what I must do—I feel lost. I do not know which way to turn—which path to take it is so full of pain—of difficulty—of shame!"

Mrs. Sylvester wrapped her arms about the girl a second time. There were tears in her eyes as she did so.

"Courage Leila," she said tenderly, as the young slender creature clung to her with a touch of passion—a breaking down of her usual pride and strength that was most eloquent—that spoke of the craving for comfort, for love, that overruled all her strength. "Courage, my dear, my brave child, now, listen to me. You must leave all this in my hands. I will meet your father this morning—it will not be the first time I have had to speak out some plain home truths to Eustace Vane—I will receive him when he arrives here. He must be made to understand that, having like a coward deserted you at a moment of great trouble, he has henceforth no further claim upon your consideration, and that both yourself and your friends have no desire for his companionship, however fascinating it may be. I may go into more material things than these even, but I shall see how matters march. Now, my dear, rouse up—put on your hat and come with me into the grounds for a brisk walk. I cannot—I will not allow you to distress yourself in this way. What have you done with Margot? You did not go down to breakfast."

Leila shook her head.

"I felt too tired, too worried. Margot is playing tennis in the covered court. I promised to go and join her; but," Leila paused and coloured deeply for a moment; "but if I might only go back to London."

Mrs. Sylvester shook her head at this determination.

"You shall go when I go, not before. Now trust all to me, Leila. I have vanquished several enemies in my time, and I am not very much afraid of Eustace Vane. Go down into the hall and wait there for me when you are dressed. Put on your warmest coat!"

Leila went obediently to her own room. She felt so weak and tired, poor child, from such continued anxiety, it was almost a relief to let the responsibility of things slip from her for a little while.

And there was something so cheering in Mrs. Sylvester's frank strong manner that Leila gathered strength from it also, strength and courage to proceed on her road all clouded and blighted as it was by her father's cruel indifference and wrong doing.

She was not long in arraying herself for a walk, and when she emerged she found Mrs. Sylvester waiting for her, having promptly set aside her correspondence and her own inclinations to give her whole attention to Leila and Leila's troubles.

"Good child," she said, warmly, as Leila came towards her with the faintest of faint smiles breaking the curve of her beautiful red lips, "you are my most obedient daughter."

"More obedient than Margot? Our dear, dear Margot!"

Mrs. Sylvester laughed as she tucked the girl's hand through her own.

"You know I have never really tested Margot yet. She is obedient because she has had no will of her own, or at least no will that is even inclined to run counter to mine. If such an event ever occurs!" and Mrs. Sylvester laughed again and shook her head, "Cicely is quite a different matter. Now I call you obedient because you sacrifice everything you desire most eagerly, simply in order to obey me. There is so little

comparison after all between my girls and you, Leila."

Leila sighed slightly.

"My life has been so different to that of other girls," she said, gently. "I feel as though I were an old, old woman. I am so tired," and then, realising the full strength of this confession, the girl hastened to modify it.

"I mean I feel tired just now, but that is because I have not been very well."

"Of course," Mrs. Sylvester assented.

She led Leila a brisk walk through the grounds. They caught a glimpse of Mrs. Bernadine walking from the conservatory to the house, her hands full of flowers.

"A beautiful woman, if not exactly a wise one," Mrs. Sylvester said, as they paused to watch Sir Julian's mother pass out of sight. "I have rarely seen a woman I more honestly admire, physically speaking."

"She seems strangely young, and," Leila paused as though she hardly knew how to frame her words.

"I know what is in your mind, Leila," Mrs. Sylvester said, "she is strangely different to what one would expect for the mother of such a son! Am I not right?"

Leila coloured.

"I really ought not to think these things. People are so different when they are really known and understood. Now I do not know either Mrs. Bernadine or her son, so my conclusions must be premature."

Mrs. Sylvester stopped to admire a bed of brilliant coloured crocuses.

"There is very little to discover in Mrs. Bernadine," she said, slowly. "She carries her real self in her eyes, on her lips. She is a tender, even a young nature, with all the faults of an over sensitive mind. In reality she is no more than a child—a child who has suffered but who has also been spoiled. Julian is quite another matter altogether." Then Mrs. Sylvester laughed, "but just hark to me, setting forth to preach observation to one who is so skilled in character, reading, and writing as you!"

"Oh!" Leila murmured deprecatingly, "please don't say such things, I love to hear you talk. I always learn something from you!"

Mrs. Sylvester tucked the girl's hand a little more closely within her arm, and walked on chatting now on Leila's work, on a hundred different things. She was only too pleased to see a light come in the girl's eyes, and a little tinge of colour creep into the cheeks. Occupied thus, the moments flew by very quickly, till a clock in some part of the grounds, striking twelve, recalled Mrs. Sylvester to the fact that she had an appointment to keep.

"I will go back now, Leila," she said. "If you follow this pathway my dear, it will bring you eventually to the covered tennis court, where you can join Margot. You look so much better for your walk. Your cheeks have a splendid colour. Don't dawdle. The air is bleak. I will come to your room and tell you all that has happened before luncheon. Run along, dear!"

Leila turned with tears starting to her eyes.

"How good you are," she said; the whole flood of her gratitude finding a vent in her voice. She walked on swiftly then. As she found herself alone, her footsteps slackened.

"How good. How true a friend!" she thought to herself. "She cheers me, she helps me! everything seems less when she takes it in hand. If I could only tell her about that other!—but it is impossible."

Leila paused and looked with unseeing eyes on the sort of wild growth that stretched around her, studded with clusters of tall golden daffodils. "Besides," she mused, on her thoughts crowding fast now in their old restless burning fashion. "Besides, the end will not be far now, please Heaven. The debt will soon be paid. I must work doubly hard. Then I—I shall be released so far as that weight is concerned. With Mrs. Sylvester it is less bitter—less—"

"Miss Vane! I thought I could not be mistaken. Are you wise to stand here; the place is so damp, and the wind is so cold!"

Leila turned with a little start and smiled

faintly up at Julian. She had not heard him coming.

"I forgot both the wind and the damp. I was thinking," she said.

Julian was silent an instant. He had no need of her words to tell him that her thoughts had been no sweet ones. The eager desire that rushed through him to relieve this beautiful fragile child of the burden of such heavy care and anxiety as oppressed her, was so strong, it surprised him a little.

"You must not stand any longer," he said, when he spoke at last. "Think what Miss Margot or Mrs. Sylvester would say if they could see their beloved invalid doing such rash things."

"I have just left Mrs. Sylvester," Leila said, and her face flushed hotly, and then paled as she remembered with sudden bitterness the cause of Mrs. Sylvester's parting from her. "She—she has gone back to the house." The girl's head was bent a little, then it was reared with a sort of desperate pride that made her whole bearing very cold. "She has gone to meet my father," she explained.

Julian uttered no sound of surprise, as he might have done under ordinary circumstances. He avoided any sort of remark about Mr. Vane. Not that he had any reason to hold his silence on this point, but that his tender interest awakened his tact to its fullest extent. He felt she would rather he made no remark.

"And you are going to join Miss Margot at the tennis court? May I walk with you?"

Leila of course assented.

"You have a beautiful home, Sir Julian," she said, as they proceeded slowly through the wooded park, rich now in its spring garment of fresh clear green, "how I love the country."

Julian stooped and pushed aside some leaves.

"May I give you these!" he asked, half-shyly.

There was a little cluster of white violets peeping from under the leaves.

Leila thanked him in her quiet grave way.

"There are such unexpected delights and treasures in the country," she said.

Julian had gone down on one knee; he wore a rough dark brown suit of corduroy, a riding suit with leather gaiters. He had a manly picturesque air. As he stooped and plucked the little tender fragrant blossoms, there was something inexpressibly strong and yet gentle about him.

Leila felt the attraction in the same way as she responded to the fascination of a flower, or of any object that was sympathetic.

His hat had slipped off, and she let her eyes rest on his dark head that bore here and there an early silver thread in the curly hair.

"I begin to understand now what has won my Margot's heart," she said to herself. "I like him very much!"

It was an unusual confession for the girl to make.

All men, and indeed almost all people, save the very very few who were linked to her life by affection, or by other causes, held no tangible position in Leila's thoughts. They fitted in and out of her life like so many phantoms, they made no impression upon her, her mind was too full of other matter.

This sudden conviction that she found Julian Bernadine satisfactory, would have surprised Leila extremely had she not at once attributed it to what in fact was the truth, the association of the man with her dear and most beloved friend.

It gave Leila a gleam of rare pleasure the feeling of confidence and liking that was developed within her at this moment, for the young man whom she imagined was not only the keeper of Margot's future happiness, but was intently desirous of holding that sacred place.

She took the violets from Julian with a smile such as he had not hitherto seen on her face.

"It is I who must tell you now, Sir Julian," she said, and the tone of her voice was as delicious and as surprising to him as her smile. "How wrong of you to kneel in this damp place."

Julian bent forward and brushed some earth from his gaiters. There was a hot flush on his brow and cheeks.

Had he not checked himself he would have started Leila considerably by the words that hovered on his lips.

He knew, however, only too well, that all knowledge of her fast increasing power over him was something that the girl was absolutely denied.

He did not try to understand the little change in her manner to him, it was enough for him there was a change, and that the glimpse of warmth and sweetness that was revealed beyond her coldness was something more infinitely beautiful than his imagination had ever conferred before him.

He was so happy in this moment, standing alone with Leila in the silence of the wood watching her little fingers pin the violets he had gathered safely on to the breast of her coat, that he felt no desire to ask for more, at least not then.

She reminded him once again of a violet herself as she stood there, so delicate, so exquisite, so full of subtle beauty and the fragrance of a fascination which was to him irresistible.

He had produced a flat case from his pocket, and Leila had taken a big pin from this case with a laugh that was almost merry.

"You are quite wonderful," she said, her glorious eyes meeting his, for an instant.

"A most desirable companion! May I look at this funny little case? You have had it a long time Sir Julian?"

"Almost all my life," Julian answered.

He tried to keep his voice even and unchanged. He wanted the pleasure to last as long as it could.

In a few moments she would have joined the others, and she would be lost to him.

Ah! if he only dare speak out the eager hope, the passion that was beginning to crowd his heart so fast, so strong; but he must have patience. She was, so far, away from him.

She did not even regard him as her friend.

He had no sort of place in her life—that strange sad burdened life—he must wait and hold his hope in check till at least their friendship had grown a little stronger—till she had learned to know him better perhaps to trust him.

It might be long in coming; but Julian's hope cried out that it would come some day—and even for the joy of being called her friend by Leila Vane, he would willingly have waited all the years of his life!

CHAPTER XIV.

LEILA examined the little well-worn case with real interest.

"And you can sew, too!" she said, as she discovered a quantity of needles, a giant-like thimble and some skeins of thread, as well as the store of pins.

Julian smiled.

"Out in the wilds of Australia I learnt to make myself useful in all sorts of ways. I believe," with his pleasant laugh, "I believe I could manage to fashion an entire wardrobe for all my life, if I were put to the dire necessity, Miss Vane!"

To himself he was thinking that his old case would henceforth carry a charm about with it since it had rested so long in those slender small hands.

Leila folded up the little leathern packet and gave it back to him.

"You must be very fond of it," she said. But his sensitive ear noted a faint change in her voice again.

He had no clue as to why this should be, he little imagined that the mere mention of the word "Australia" was sufficient to drive away any touch of pleasure that might come to Leila.

"I like all old and tried companions," he answered. "I am at heart a rigid Conservative."

"I think most of us are that in reality," Leila said with a faint smile; "we cling to what we know."

"I remember," Julian continued, as they pro-

ceeded along the path again, "I remember many little instances when my great skill with the needle has served me well. Your friend, Mr. Bartlett, for instance was——"

"Mr. Bartlett is not my friend," Leila said here hurriedly, almost fiercely; then she checked herself, remembering swiftly the strange impression she might give. "He was my father's secretary; beyond that I have no real acquaintance with him," she said after that abrupt pause.

Julian just glanced at her; there was a touch of deep emotion in his voice as he answered her.

"I am glad you did not admit Bartlett to your friendship," he said. "I do not care to speak ill of any man, yet of this man I do not find I can speak much that is good." He paused here, he suddenly had a sort of contraction at his heart as he recalled the first moment his eyes had rested on Leila Vane's loveliness. "Yet," he added, now hurriedly, "he called you his friend. He carries your picture."

Leila had grown very pale.

"I had a shock when you told me you had seen my portrait in Mr. Bartlett's possession. I do not know how it came there, Sir Julian. Most surely he did not receive it from my hands; but there were many pictures of me in my old home; one of these must have been stolen. To such a man as Mr. Bartlett such a theft would mean very little."

Julian looked at her delicate face. There was a coldness upon it that was almost indescribable—a sort of aversion in her voice that seemed to escape her unconsciously.

"I am sorry I should have spoken of it, Miss Vane," he said, gently. "Had I known——"

Leila broke in with a little wailing note in her voice,—

"Oh, it does not matter. I am foolish. I—I ought to know so much better by this time. I ought to realise that even in little things I must be prepared for vexation, for sorrow." Then she quickened her steps. "Are we not almost close to the Court? I can hear some voices!" she asked, hurriedly.

"It lies just there," Julian said, falling easily into her mood, and hastening at once to dismiss the subject of Bartlett from their conversation; "but we have to make a detour to reach it. I hope you are not tired. Are you thinking of joining in a game?"

The girl smiled at this and shook her head; but the smile went almost instantly.

"Oh! I am useless at any game—tennis, in particular, is most mysterious to me—Margot has tried to teach me, but I am so dull and stupid I cannot learn!"

He saw that she spoke with an effort of gaiety. His whole heart yearned out over her. He could not endure to see so fair, so young, a creature shadowed so perpetually. It troubled him in a double sense, not only because he could not bear to know that any woman suffered, but because he felt himself drawn hour by hour nearer and nearer to the hope, the joy of sometime mingling his life with hers.

It was a phase that had come to him swiftly and unconsciously. He knew now as he walked beside her through the fresh green woods that the keynote of this love and hope must have been struck the very first moment of their meeting—even before they had met actually. He remembered vividly how keen had been the interest with which he had gazed upon that pictured girlish face out in Henry Bartlett's Australian bungalow.

A pang came all at once to the man's eager heart as Bartlett flashed through his thoughts. He gave one glance at her face. The passion, the contempt, the hate with which she had just spoken, Bartlett's name rang in his ears again, and with their memory came a hot thought, a thought that was a question and a pain.

What cause had this young girl for so strong a hatred for any man?

What bond had there been between himself and Henry Bartlett? What bond might not still exist?

Julian felt his own cheeks grow as pale as her's, he had a chilled sensation upon him, and

yet his pulses were beating at a galloping pace.

At this moment the path merged into two, and a groom came up to Sir Julian and handed him a telegram.

With a word of courteous permission from Leila, the young man opened the telegram.

"Let the messenger wait," he said to the groom, "I shall be at the house in a few moments. I want to send an answer."

As they were alone he turned to Leila.

"I have had pleasant news, Miss Vane," he said, "my cousin, Giles Bernadine, will be with us this evening. I am so glad, so very glad!"

His whole countenance bore witness to the sincerity of these last words. He had lost his pallor and the questioning anxiety that had haunted his eyes a moment before.

Leila felt her heart stirred by his earnest manner, and by his voice, so mellow and so full of sincere pleasure. She had heard the story of Giles Bernadine from Margot, but she had not realised the full value of Sir Julian's affectionate eager interest on his young cousin's account until this moment.

She spoke quite involuntarily.

"I am glad, too," she said, and her tone was soft and tender as it had been at the moment when he had given her the violets.

Julian thanked her warmly.

"I have wanted the boy to come here all this time, but I could not persuade him to do so—he is so unhappy, Miss Vane—and I am so utterly convinced that he is suffering for the sin of another."

"He is coming to stay here?" Leila asked, feeling drawn herself to this boy whom she did not know.

Sir Julian shook his head.

"No, he will not come to the house, but he has agreed at last to a plan I proposed a few weeks back. There is a little lodge deep in the lower part of the grounds, and instead of rushing abroad as he intended, Giles will stay at this lodge until I have thoroughly investigated this scandal. I am so eager to have the boy re-instated in his old place, and to take away the shadow of dishonour that is breaking his father's heart."

Leila looked at him, there were tears in her glorious eyes.

"It is a good work, and I am sure you will succeed, Sir Julian. I will pray that you may succeed, and quickly too," she held out her small hand; "do not let me keep you, Sir Julian, this message is important."

He held her hand clasped so firmly, so tenderly, that the girl became sensible of a strange thrilling pleasure for that moment in which their hands clung together.

She stood and watched him stride away with the pleasure lingering, and with an added sense of interest in, and liking for, this young man.

"He is good," she said to herself with conviction, "he is indeed worthy of my Margot!"

Leila turned at this thought and moved onwards down the path that led to the large tennis court and gymnasium which was one of the many attractions of Wilton Croft.

As she drew nearer to the sound of the merry voices that came from within she suddenly changed her plans.

She felt in no mood for amusement, more especially for the sort of weak wit which always circulated when Cicely Sylvester was surrounded (as she was certain to be just now) by her admirers. Leila, too, was distinctly conscious by this time that Cicely's sharpness and her sneers were based on malicious intent; not that this really troubled Leila, for she knew that Margot's sister was influenced in all she did by jealousy and egotism; but with her mind strung up to nervous tension by the knowledge of what was passing between her father and Mrs. Sylvester, she was less inclined than usual to tolerate Cicely's folly or flippant cynicism.

She retraced her steps slowly, her old nervousness gradually conquering her again.

She could not wholly forget the memory of Julian's, the charm of his manner, of his frank goodness and his tenderness was something that had approached her so nearly that it would linger



A GROOM ADVANCED TO SIR JULIAN AND HANDED HIM A TELEGRAM.

with her, even though her thought was devoted back again to the subject of her father.

She wondered what method Mrs. Sylvester would use to bring home to this strange man the truth of his wrong-doing.

Leila had a bitter sense of the failure that would attend her kind friend's efforts. She knew her father too well now; all his tricks, his airy ways of meeting difficulties.

Leila could have been amused a little in picturing the sort of scene that would pass between Mrs. Sylvester—positive, practical, rigidly straightforward, and her butterfly father—graceful, fascinating, eel-like, yet, none the less, rigidly crooked, had not her heart been so sore.

She wandered alone in this solitary spot for a long time, she had lost count of the moments; but after awhile she awoke to the fact that it must be close upon two hours since Mrs. Sylvester had left her; she determined all at once to return to the house, she walked back through the grounds quickly.

Her heart thrilled with fear and with a new sensation. For the first time she viewed an approaching meeting with her father with reluctance, with pain, with a shrinking that was almost horror.

So much had been done to change the spirit of devotion, of clinging love which she had lavished upon this man; she would have given all her life to have felt once again as she had been wont to feel towards Eustace Vane; but she knew only too well that this would never, never be.

His cruelty to her, his desertion, and his dishonour, were all too new, too great, to be put on one side. Leila's one strong wish was not to be brought in contact with him ever again.

She had suffered so long, so much, till the iron had entered her soul.

As she drew near to the house, she became aware of a group standing at the door. She quickly recognised Mrs. Bernadine's graceful figure and charming face.

She was talking animatedly to a man standing beside a horse.

Leila knew, rather than saw, that this man was her father. Sir Julian's tall form was the third in the group; Mrs. Sylvester was not there.

Leila paused as she realised this. She would have retreated but it was too late, Eustace Vane had caught sight of her.

"Here she is at last!" he cried, his voice tinged with just the proper element of fatherly affection and reproach; "my little girl, I thought you were never coming; where have you been? I have worn Mrs. Bernadine's patience to a thread since I would not go without a kiss from my Leila."

She did not advance towards the outstretched hand; her eyes rested on the man's face and form, so fascinating, so handsome, so eloquent of prosperity and freedom from anxiety.

"I remained away on purpose, father," she said, and her low troubled voice seemed to smite Julian's heart as with a pain. "I did not wish to interfere with your conversation with Mrs. Sylvester."

Eustace Vane dropped his hand and laughed, but his eyes went towards Mrs. Bernadine with an appeal in them that seemed like the expression of a sigh.

"You might have guessed that your greeting would be dearer to me, Leila, my child, than a dozen greetings from Mrs. Sylvester," he said, and his tone was perfect.

The girl grew ashen white.

"I know not, father," she answered, coldly, and yet with passion, "I know not what right I had to expect a greeting after so strange a farewell." She came a little nearer. "Mrs. Bernadine and Sir Julian will forgive me, I hope," she said, very quietly, "if I remind you that Mrs. Sylvester expects an interview with you, since you have come here."

There was a curious gleam in Eustace Vane's eyes. Leila's changed demeanour was a blow to the selfish scoundrel who had traded so long upon her girlish faith and adoration, but such an old soldier as he in the tricks and tactics of life's

warfare, was not likely to let himself be dismayed by this blow, unexpected as it was. He had never had anything but a sense of tolerance and contempt for the girl. Had she not been necessary to him, he would have shunned her long ago.

She had never seemed more desirable, or more full of future possibilities than now, when she had withdrawn herself from him, but Eustace Vane would make no effort to woo her back. She had been guilty of disloyalty to him, he said to himself, grandiloquently, she should suffer in consequence.

Leila standing there waiting for her father to reply to her last speech, shivered as her eyes met his. Henceforth he would not be merely selfish and cruelly indifferent to her; he would be her enemy!

(To be continued.)

THE introduction of mahogany into England and the commerce of the world was caused by the repairing with a plank of that wood of one of Sir Walter Raleigh's vessels in 1595.

IN Siam, when there is a question at law between two parties and a scarcity of witnesses to establish the truth in the case, it is customary to resort to the water test. Both parties are required to dive simultaneously into deep water, and the one that stays the longest under is adjudged the truth-teller, and gets the verdict.

HAVRE is the first town in Europe to completely substitute electricity for other methods of propulsion upon the tramways. The system adopted is the overhead wire supported on posts which are also used for carrying arc lamps. The cars are forty in number, and are capable of carrying fifty passengers. Some have two motors, but the majority have only one, and all are geared on the axle direct. An electric railway has been recently opened at Kiow, in Russia—the first in that country. It is about two miles long, with gradients as high as nine per cent.



LOOKING QUICKLY TOWARDS THE ORCHARD GATE MARGERY BEHELD MR. LYNNE ADVANCING IN HER DIRECTION.

DR. DURHAM'S DAUGHTER.

—10:—

CHAPTER XL

THE month of "the sere and yellow leaf"—the sad, prophetic month of September—is yet a very kind and genial one sometimes.

Thus it chanced on the day of Mrs. Kildare's picnic, though why it should have been called Mrs. Kildare's especial affair, any more so than the Durhams', or Mr. Price's, or Sir George Stoke's, since each one invited thereunto was expected to contribute something more or less substantial to strengthen the bill of fare, Margery herself could never quite understand—thus it chanced on that particular day that the sun shone out radiantly from a sky of fleecy blue, and the wind was as soft and southerly as a mid-May breeze.

The very birds as they sang in the alady branches, or skimmed on light and joyous wing over the tufted meadows seemed to fancy that spring had returned once more, months before her time.

At half-past eleven o'clock that morning the Durhams' pony carriage drove briskly from the house-door; Mr. Lynne and Aunt Susan in front, Margery and a huge hamper behind—Ned, the surgery-boy lurking in the cool gateway to see the company start.

"Can you find room for your knees, Margery?" inquired matter-of-fact Aunt Susan, hoisting a large blue sunshade, which every now and then did its best to dislodge Mr. Lynne's hat or to peck out his left eye, and glancing over her ample shoulder at her niece's cramped figure on the back seat. "I am afraid you are finding it a rather tight fit my dear!"

"A tight fit!" echoed Margery, laughing rather ruefully. "you are right, Aunt Susan! I do not care how soon we may find ourselves in Slingford Beeches."

"Bless you, my dear, it would be a tighter fit if I were there!" laughed back Aunt Susan,

jovially. "And have you also sufficient room, Mr. Lynne?" turning then to their grave young Jehu.

"Thank you, yes."

"I must beg of you to be careful, Mr. Lynne, all the same. There is that apricot pie, recollect, which we could not get into the hamper, put down somewhere or other by your heels."

"I'll recollect," promised Mr. Lynne.

Along the dusty road they went, the meridian sun smiting down upon them through the faint-blue vanishing morning haze.

"I hope you will all have a pleasant day," kindly Dr. Durham had said when he got up from the table to leave his women-folk after breakfast.

"I hope so, I'm sure," had responded Aunt Susan, heartily.

Well, thought Margery, herself, she felt happy enough at present, but how would it be by-and-by, she wondered!

She gazed reflectively at Mr. Lynne's wide shoulders, there side by side with those of Aunt Susan, yet wider and much fatter, her smart flowered silk gown showing plainly through the thin muslin cape she wore, her equally smart bonnet with its lofty poke now happily sheltered under her blue umbrella.

Merciful powers! thought Margery with a shudder, how resplendent would appear Aunt Susan when she should step forth presently in all her glory upon the emerald greensward of Slingford Beeches!

Would Mrs. Kildare laugh at her covertly, and say something aside in French to Yolande, Margery wondered uneasily! That would be Mrs. Kildare all over, if she did so.

And albeit Margery Durham was dressed coolly and simply enough herself, she somehow grew warm from head to foot as she gazed at her Aunt Susan Patchett. Well, after all, it was no fault of hers—Margery's—if Aunt Susan chose to make such a spectacle of herself.

They were all to assemble in the Slingford Beeches between twelve and one o'clock—such

was the arrangement agreed upon—and the horses and vehicles were to be put up at "The Silent Woman," a lonely inn of a somewhat tumble-down description, which stood near to the entrance of the forest surrounded by patches of furze.

A wild-looking place it would be, undoubtedly, with a stormy autumn sunset behind it.

The servants whom Sir George Stoke had promised to bring with him would afterwards convey the provision hampers from "The Silent Woman" to the rendezvous in the forest, as Mrs. Kildare of course called it.

About a couple of miles or so out of Foxdale the Durham party overtook the Rev. Timothy Price, ambling along the road in the brooding sun astride his stout brown cob.

"Ab, how d'ye do! how d'ye do!" cried out Aunt Susan, very nearly flourishing her big blue sunshade in the exuberance of her enjoyment and high good-humour. "We, I think, shall get there first, Mr. Price—yes, we shall get there first!"

The Rector of Slingford himself was not going; nor were Lawyer Johnson and his family; only the Durhams, the Kildares, Sir George Stoke, and Mr. Price—and that was enough, Mrs. Kildare had decided.

Doubtless, in her own mind, more than enough. Because everyone of course was aware that the jaunt had been organised solely on account of Yolande and her titled adorer.

He had been dallying too long already, thought Mrs. Kildare—he must be brought or driven to the point somehow or other. If fitting opportunities were not forthcoming, why, she would take upon herself to create them, to put a few right under his very nose, as it were—that was all.

She would get up a little picnic, for one thing, and see what that would do.

Certainly Yolande herself alone was more than enough to provoke the patience of a saint, seeing that she would not assist the wooing one job, nor lift even so much as a finger to egg the suitor on.

Figuratively speaking, there were the handsome doors of Revelstoke Hall standing open wide and waiting unmistakably for her dainty foot to step across the threshold, and yet she positively, wilfully, refused to accept her good fortune, and remained as passive, as obstinate, as coldly uncertain, as though indeed the suitor were the most ordinary of lovers and, not Sir George Stoke of Revelstoke at all!

Oh dear! oh dear! it was enough to make one desperate—to drive one wild—to turn one's hair gray! Yet, never mind—either by hook or by crook the foolish young man and his thousands should be caught for Yolande *somehow*. At any rate, so in her own mind had determined Mrs. Kildare!

If she could only have excluded Lylph Lynne from the merry-making!—Lylph Lynne who had appeared so inopportunistically in Foxdale, to drive her mad once more with anxiety and to ruin utterly her peace of mind!

And she had believed that they had seen the last of him and said goodbye to him for ever! Poor worldly, scheming, disappointed Mrs. Kildare!

When the Durham pony-carriage drove past the Grange House—the picturesque thatched dwelling, with its gables wreathed with roses, standing in the midst of its bowery well-kept grounds—there was one of Mrs. Kildare's maid-servants, in the cleanest of pink print gowns and the snowiest of coquettish caps, leaning idly over the white entrance gate.

"Is your mistress gone yet?" called out Aunt Susan severely.

"Dear me, yes, mem!" A quarter of an hour ago, I should say, mem," answered the damsel pertly.

"Well, I might have guessed as much," said Aunt Susan, looking round at Margery, "or the saucy jade would not be flaunting her fiery out-yonder to attract the notice of passers-by. When the cat's away the mice will play." Now, I'll be bound she is wishing it was Slingford market-day."

Margery only smiled, and Aunt Susan spoke again.

"Margery, my dear," said she rather abruptly, "you surely ought to reckon yourself a very fortunate girl."

"Why pray, Aunt Susan?" Margery inquired innocently, wiping the dust from her eyes.

"Now ought she not, Mr. Lynne?"—appealing illogically to him.

"Possibly—of course—I daresay," answered he, rather at random, rousing himself seemingly from a reverie, and beginning to flick the worrying flies from the pony's glossy neck.

"Of course she is a fortunate girl," repeated Aunt Susan emphatically. "Why, the very home that shelters her—her father's own dwelling-house—will of itself be no mean heritage; but with such a property as the Grange and other things in addition to it, she will be necessarily at her father's death, you see—"

"For pity's sake, be silent, aunt, please!" entreated Margery, half angrily, half beseechingly.

"I hate to think of anything of the kind, and you know it. I hate the bare notion of an inheritance, no matter how desirable, since it can come to me only through—only through—"

"Look," Lylph Lynne interposed, with characteristic tact—"look, Mrs. Patchett! What large white place is that? Yonder there, showing plainly through the grove of firs!"

"Oh, that, sir, is Revelstoke—Revelstoke Hall, you know," explained Aunt Susan blandly; "only we have driven right round the hills, as one may say, and now see the back of the house instead of the front of it; and you don't recognise it, perhaps, from this point of view. It is an immense building when you get quite near to it, and the stairs and passages are all solid stone. Talking of lucky young women, Miss Yolande Kildare will certainly be amongst the number if she and that cunning mother of hers between them should succeed in catching young Stoke."

"I wish him joy," observed Lylph Lynne, briefly and indifferently.

About half-past twelve o'clock they arrived at "The Silent Woman," where a waddling battalion of Michaelmas geese, led by a vicious-looking fat

gander, whose days in all likelihood were numbered, greeted each one of them with discordant cackle as they alighted at the door of the inn.

During Aunt Susan's slow and careful descent the clamour they made was deafening.

In a neighbouring pond of Stygian hue the ducks were bobbing up and down for the dainties that lay beneath the surface; whilst from the moss-grown trough which stood hard by the porch, milk-white throated pigeons were drinking thirstily, just home from the distant pea-fields.

Margery noticed that the Grange House pony-carriage and Sir George Stoke's dog-cart were already housed together under a rickety shed adjoining the lonely inn; so the young Baronet and the Kildares, at any rate, were already under the shade of the "greenwood tree."

Soon indeed the Durham party came upon the lovely Yolande and her mother, who were looking delightfully cool and fresh, and resting upon a fern bank beneath the boughs of the spreading beeches.

Mrs. Kildare was trifling with a soiled strip of fancy-work, which she called her "embroidery;" and Sir George Stoke lay stretched—like Hercules before Omphale—at idle Yolande's feet.

He jumped up however at the approach of Margery Durham and her companions, looking, as he greeted them, more over-grown and sheepish than ever.

"Ah, here you are at last!" gushed Mrs. Kildare, putting aside her embroidery into the tiny reticule which dangled from a silver girde round her waist. "But where is our dear droll friend, Mr. Price?"

Whereupon Aunt Susan explained that they had passed the Vicar on the road, and therefore he could not be so very much behind themselves.

"Unless," added she, with her hearty laugh, "the brown cob has bolted with him—which is scarcely probable—and carried him off in an opposite direction!"

Yolande herself was talking carelessly with Mr. Lynne.

How well, thought Margery bitterly, watching them, did those two play their parts before the world!

Here Sir George Stoke lounged up to the side of the doctor's daughter, his eyes all the while however straying restlessly towards Yolande.

"Hot, Miss Margery, isn't it?" was the young man's original remark—"extraordinarily so for September, upon my word."

Margery agreed that it was both extraordinary and delightful.

"Oh, yes, it is all very delightful," said Sir George; "but at the same time hardly the thing, you know, for tramping the stubble—after the birds, you know. It's awful work, Miss Margery, with the sun at Heaven knows what degree in the shade—'tis, 'pon my word. Why, the very gun would scorch your shoulder, you know."

"I suppose it might," said Margery, with but languid interest in the hypothesis.

All round them lay the dusky solitudes of the lonely forest, with patches of tremulous saffron sunlight slanting through here and there amid the hoary boles of the great old trees.

The drowsy hum of insects, the sad, tender cooing of dove or wood-pigeon, rose and fell with sweet monotony upon the heavy, leafy stillness which reigned throughout the place.

Somewhere in the vicinity of their rendezvous they could hear distinctly the liquid cadence of some sylvan stream, as if gliding and gurgling and tumbling over stepping-stones that were mossy and green from long disuse.

Sometimes in the shadow dead leaves stirred mysteriously, as if moved by the scudding feet of a frightened hare.

How lovely, how exquisite it all was, thought Margery, with a swelling heart and almost tearful eyes! How good to His creatures was the Creator to have fashioned a world so fair!

Then she looked at Yolande standing near her—how lovely, how wondrously fair was she too!

Outwardly, at least, a woman "nobly planned"—another exquisite specimen of Nature's faultless handiwork!

To-day, fancied Margery Durham, with a feeling akin to despair, Yolande looked slimmer,

lovelier if possible than ever, in her long white soft-clinging gown and slouched gray Cavalier hat—which she wore just a trifle on one side, like a Gainsborough portrait—around the felt crown of which curled a white and scarlet ostrich feather that drooped far over the hat's wide brim until the red tip rested lightly upon the wearer's shoulder.

Now and then one caught a glimpse of her dead gold hair; occasionally flashed the light of her dreamy yet passionate eyes—those dangerous, dark-lashed, hazel eyes which had in them often

"Just that soft shade of green we sometimes see in evening skies."

"Come, Margery pet, and—and you, Mr. Lynne," exclaimed Mrs. Kildare adroitly, "and let me show you the charming nook we have selected for spreading our cloth! It is merely a few steps from here, close by that sweet rhododendron grove which you see yonder. I assure you it is a most enchanting spot—neither Oberon nor Titania could ever have desired or dreamed of a sweeter."

But Yolande, wayward and self-willed as usual, chose to direct things otherwise.

"No," she put in idly, "you needn't exert yourself, my good mother, to any such extent. Margery Durham is coming with me. You and Mrs. Patchett had better remain here together and wait for the hampers and the servants; they will soon come now. Besides, Mr. Price has not yet arrived. If no one looks out for him to tell him where we all are, he may perhaps lose his way and us altogether."

And so carelessly speaking, and laughing slightly, her low sweet laugh, she linked her arm through Margery's, and together the two girls strolled in the direction of the rhododendrons.

Sir George Stoke and Mr. Lynne were by this time on ahead of them; the former, having already experienced a fair amount of snubbing, was disposed to wax sulky with Yolande.

But not a straw cared she for his obvious ill-humour—a smile would quickly bring him to her side again, she knew.

"Treacherous—wily—false to the very core!" sighed Margery Durham involuntarily to herself. "What, I wonder what, can she hope to gain in the end?"

CHAPTER XII.

AND presently the bursting hampers were opened, and rilled of their goodly contents—the cloth was spread and garnished upon the velvet carpet of the forest.

It only remained for them to "fall to," as Sir George Stoke expressed it, characteristically, which they all did accordingly with a will.

The pure country air had sharpened their appetites, so that the hunger of traditional hunters was as nothing in comparison with theirs.

Mrs. Kildare, in the place which she evidently considered the head of the table, had arranged herself gracefully upon a rough deal case which had contained soda-water.

Sir George Stoke, facing her, was quaking visibly upon a hamper perilously too small for him.

The Rev. Timothy Price, whose sleepy over-fed cob had at last ambled up to the door of "The Silent Woman," was sharing a couple of chaise cushions with jovial Aunt Susan.

Mr. Lynne, Yolande, and Margery Durham had settled themselves as comfortably as circumstances would permit on two or three shawls and a carriage-rug.

In the background Sir George Stoke's footmen were opening champagne bottles; and the sharp popping of the corks and the crisp rattling of the ice were sounds wondrously sweet to their thirsty souls.

"Oh, this is more than charming—it is idyllic!" cried Mrs. Kildare, throwing aloft her jewelled hands and gazing affectingly upward at the yellowing foliage of the giant beeches.

"Beautiful indeed!" agreed Aunt Susan, with

out so much as lifting her eyes, however, from her plate of pickled trout.

"Mrs. Kildare, I think, is right, is she not?" Margery remarked shyly, addressing Lyulph Lynne. "You too are delighted, I hope, Mr. Lynne, with these grand old beeches of ours?"

"Indeed I am—I am enjoying it all immensely," he returned, smiling. "I am a student of human nature, in my way, you know."

"Are you?" she cried. "Well, one would hardly guess that you are really enjoying it—you are so quiet."

"Do not you think," he replied gently, "that our quiet pleasures are oftentimes the more heart-felt and real?"

And waiting for no rejoinder, he then turned gravely to Yolande.

"I trust that you are comfortable, Miss Kildare?" he inquired courteously.

"Thanks—perfectly," she answered coldly.

Lyulph Lynne, as is chance, was placed between the two girls; and on the other side of Miss Kildare sat Sir George Stoke.

The spirits of the enamoured young man were rising rapidly, what with an unexpected smile or two from the beautiful Yolande, and the exhilarating quality of his own champagne, which of course, was beyond reproach.

"Try one of these patties, or a little of this prairie bird," Mrs. Kildare was saying woeingly to the young master of Revelstoke. "My cook is a clever good soul, I assure you. With her it is never '*grande cuisine, petits faiseurs*.' The creature invariably is as true as her word."

"Is she really so? You are very kind. Yes I think I will trouble you, after all."

"Oh, certainly! Don't mention it! And what delicious fruit!"

"Yes; it is remarkably fine. And you say that you really prefer claret-cup?"

"Infinitely rather. I think it is much more refreshing, myself, and far less heating."

"Blake, look sharp! Another glass for Mr. Price. I presume that you'll take port, sir, with your cheese?"

"Thank you, sir—don't mind if I do."

"Positively, this Maraschino jelly is something more than delicious! I wish you would send me the recipe, Mrs. Patchett."

"With pleasure. But I fancy you will like the Pistachio even better—it has the more piquant flavour of the two. Try it, please, Mrs. Kildare."

And pop—pop! pop—pop! fly the corks in the background.

"Dear me! how sleepy this warm woodland air makes one, to be sure! And look yonder, how the leaves are falling!"

"Ah," chimed in Aunt Susan again, cheerfully, "the fall of the leaf is a whisper to the living."

Such odds and ends and flying fragments of their trivial, desultory talk belonging to the records of that long since dead-and-gone day which they spent in Slingford Beeches still linger, even now, ever fresh in the memory of Margery Durham—the recollection of them undimmed by the vanished years.

Utter silence was brooding among the great old trees, the tangled thickets, the closing flowers; ghoul-like shadows were beginning to enwrap themselves about the gnarled roots and boles of the forest kings, as the afternoon sun, still glowing and warm, travelled steadily over to the western gate of heaven.

Their woodland repast was at an end; though they yet kept their places around the cloth; and now the hungry lackeys, at a respectful distance, and with their backs turned to the company, were in the middle of theirs.

With what amazing rapidity did they put the good things out of sight! It was to be hoped, indeed, that a gluttony so indiscriminate might not bring on an attack of indigestion!

"Look here, now—let us have a song!" cried Sir George Stoke, suddenly. "I am just in the humour, now, for a song—something pretty and catchy, you know, eh?"

"Ah, yes, please!" seconded Mrs. Kildare, clasping her hands with a plaintive, pleading air. "A little song, by all means, someone! It is

just the *coup de théâtre* necessary, as one might say, to crown the perfection of this lovely scene. A song would be in complete harmony with our present idyllic surroundings," gushed Mrs. Kildare.

"So it would, by Jove!" cried Sir George, boisterously.

"And who is to sing, pray?" inquired Yolande.

She had doffed her Cavalier hat and tossed it on to the moss at her side. A wandering beam from the setting sun alighted upon the folds of her soft white gown, and then shot upward and kissed coquettishly the feathery tresses of her amber hair.

"Who is to sing?" echoed Mrs. Kildare sweetly, almost beseechingly, "why, you darling. Who else?"

"Yes, you, of course, Miss Kildare," whispered Sir George in her ear, eagerly; "because, you see, nobody else here can, I believe!"

"Thanks for the compliment," said Yolande out loud, with a little yawn, "but you must be good enough to excuse me, however. I have somehow always looked upon singing out-of-doors—no matter under what circumstances or conditions—more as a favourite pastime of the *bas peuple*, Bristol excursionists, and so forth, than anything else. It is kind of you to wish to hear me; but as I say—"

She yawned again wearily, shrugged her shoulders slightly, and partly closed her eyes—leaning still farther back, at the same time, against the tree-trunk she was sitting near, and showing them all the soft cream tints of her lovely slender throat.

Nevertheless, her mother's meaning glances, conjoined with Sir George's importunities, prevailed in the end; and Yolande sang to them "Robin Adair."

Tired as was Margery of the sweet, slow old tune, she could not but admire it, and listen to it again as Yolande Kildare sang it to them that day in the forest.

For the tones of her voice—

"By turns were glad,
Sweetly solemn, wildly sad."

And yet Lyulph Lynne was the only member of the party who remained mute and unappreciative when the song was ended.

That song, Margery well knew, was sung expressly for him, and him alone; but he thanked her—Yolande—for it afterwards in no wise whatever.

And Yolande made no sign that she suffered—that his coldness and indifference hurt her beyond expression.

She was merely a little paler than before; a trifle more distant in her manner towards him than before; and that was all. And so the day wore on.

It would take too long to recount how they spent the remainder of those sunny hours before "sable-vested" night drew near and drove them home—how they wandered about at will through the shadowy forest glens and cool, quiet glades, red-glowing here and there in the dying sunlight, where the rabbits were wont to limp and caper at eventide, and nibble the wild-thyme wet with dew; while the lackeys were busily packing the fragments of the feast and setting out the tea-cups and saucers—how they went back and boiled a kettle of water gipsy-fashion, with no trouble to speak of, and then set to work again in the rhododendron grove upon fragrant *Souchong* and thin bread-and-butter.

But at length the kingly sun went down in earnest, after fringing with flamingo tints the "opal towers and battlements of heaven," and twilight fell and crept around them unawares.

A chill night wind began to breathe through the forest and to carry away with it the lingering warmth of a day which seemed too fair to die.

So, with lagging steps, they once more betook themselves to the sign of "The Silent Woman," and there prepared for the homeward drive.

"Now," cried the indefatigable Mrs. Kildare, "you should all by rights come home with Yolande and me, and so finish up a charming day with us at the Grange. Sir George is coming, and why should not everyone else?"

And then Mrs. Kildare bit her lip and looked vexed with herself, conscious that her over-acted juvenile precipitance had carried her past the boundary line of discretion.

But she need not have feared.

Lyulph Lynne was standing, as it happened, close to Yolande. The dusk was deepening rapidly.

"Do," she murmured, leaning towards him from the side of their low pony-carriage, her whole soul in her voice and eyes—"do, Lyulph, to please *sac!*"

His profile was pale and set.

"Thank you for myself, Mrs. Kildare," he said, in accents level and distinct, "but I have duties awaiting me at home. So please excuse—"

"Oh, well, then," interposed Aunt Susan, "that settles it. If Mr. Lynne is unable to stop, *ma'am*, I am sure we must not either. And perhaps it is best that we shouldn't, after all; for you know I am going a journey to-morrow, and ought to get early to bed—"

The Kildares, however, were off; they had dashed away down the quiet dark road and were lost in the fast gathering night.

It was Yolande who held the reins—Yolande who wielded the cruel whip.

Sir George Stoke, in his high dog-cart, lifting his hat hurriedly, rattled after them at a break-neck pace.

But fleet and thorough-bred as was the animal he drove, it was plain that he would experience no slight difficulty in overtaking the Kildares' madly-galloping ponies.

It was past eight o'clock that evening when Margery Durham and her companions got back into Foxdale, and the gibbous moon was rising wanly behind the old church tower.

The doctor's daughter and Mr. Lynne went in together, leaving Aunt Susan and the Rev. Timothy Price—whose ambling fat cob, for a wonder, had kept up with them famously all the way home—standing outside upon the moon-splashed pebbles to say a long farewell.

Not until she returned from her visit to Cousin Caroline would Aunt Susan and her old friend meet again.

"This has been a happy day for me," said Lyulph Lynne to Margery in the hall.

"Has it? I am glad," she replied very gently; and could say nothing more.

Then they separated, Mr. Lynne going to his work in the surgery, Margery to seek her father in the library.

Ay, after all, it had proved a happy day, and for Margery Durham, at least, its memory would remain imperishable.

"Bear in mind, Margery," were Aunt Susan's parting words to her niece before climbing into the coach at Caxton Cross about half-past nine o'clock on the following morning, "that 'a bad broom leaves a dirty room.' Look well after the maids, particularly Molly, and take every care of your father. Write to me as often as you can; and—And Heaven bless you, my dear!"

And now at last she was really gone; and at last, too, Margery Durham found herself her father's housekeeper.

She felt quite proud and visibly important as she took the key-basket into her own possession, and every inch a housewife and responsible mistress, when panting Betty the cook came to her for orders.

Then Margery, remembering Aunt Susan's injunction, kept a sharp eye on Molly the housemaid—who however was always a good and willing lass enough with her master's daughter—and saw that she did not skip her dusting, and that Sally at noon was as neat in her person as befitted a respectable parlourmaid.

Then Margery and Mr. Lynne sat down to luncheon by themselves—as indeed they would now have to do for many a day to come—he very grave at one end of the table; she very sedate at the other; a domestic arrangement, by the way, which certain spinsters in Foxdale very soon pronounced to be of a highly improper character; though why anyone should have thought and said such a thing was wholly beyond the comprehension of Margery.

Dr. Durham himself—who, as has been men-

tioned before, was seldom if ever at home to the midday meal—saw not the least harm in it; and so that was sufficient for Margery too.

The first day of her reign, as it pleased her to call it, passed very quickly and pleasantly, what with going about the house on one errand and another, and living over again in tender retrospection the golden hours of yesterday.

There were flowers, late summer flowers, still blooming in the garden, keeping it bright with colour, and there were likely to be, moreover, so long as the beautiful Indian summer should see fit to linger over the land.

But the crooked moss-clad apple-trees, the spreading mulberries, and the stooping old blighted pear-trees upon the hilly lawn—all these alas! were growing barer and gaunter with each swift vanishing day.

The speckled saffron leaves in showers fell silently earthward and strewed the grassy mounds, the paths, and the flower-beds, or drifted, when the wind blew, into the lichen-grown corners of the buttresses of the garden wall.

Margery Durham had dressed for dinner early, and had gone down for a stroll into the orchard.

Here also the leaves were beginning to fall, littering thickly the once daisied hillocks, and rustling dirge-like beneath one's feet.

The very nut-trees and alders which grew by the side of the brook had taken a paler, a yet sadder tint since last Margery's eyes had looked upon their brown network of boughs.

Sadness and decay indeed were in the mild, soft air—the brook was singing a song of death.

Still the sun as yesterday shone radiantly, and the sky was fleckless blue; heaven was smiling benignly upon earth as it had smiled on the day before.

Margery's flowers for the table had been cut in the afternoon; she had absolutely nothing to do until her father should come home to dinner.

How balmy and warm and delightful it was out of doors! What said the clock?

Margery looked at her watch—the hands were pointing to the quarter past six. Then there was just one whole hour and a quarter before Dr. Durham would be likely to show himself in the dining-room.

Well, she must wander about and amuse herself as best she might until then, thought Margery.

Certainly she missed her Aunt Susan—missed her greatly in fact; she could not well do otherwise, having lived under the same roof with her for so long. Still, as we all know, there is a difference between missing and regretting.

Presently Margery heard the click of the orchard gate; and looking quickly towards it, she beheld Mr. Lynne advancing in her direction.

As he approached, she felt her colour fading; her heart all at once seemed to stand still.

"I have been seeking you everywhere in the garden," he said, smiling, "and was just despairing of tracking your whereabouts when I happened to catch sight of your gown between the trees here. Are you reading, Miss Durham, may I ask?"

"No," she told him. "I—I was simply looking at the brook, and listening to its melancholy flow. I fear you will think me very idle, Mr. Lynne. Can I do anything—do you want me?"

"Yes, if you will spare me your attention," he answered very seriously. "Since you are not reading a story, I have one to tell you—taking it of course for granted that you are in the mood to listen to me!"

Margery Durham looked up quickly.

Was he at last, then, about to speak of himself, or to tell her something of—

"Is it—is it about Yolande Kildare?" she asked suddenly, a little shiver creeping over her unawares.

"Yes," he replied, a shadow now upon his own face. "It is of her that I would speak, Miss Durham, if you will only hear me. Of no one else."

There was silence then. Margery waited.

Somehow or other, now that the veil was about to be lifted, she would have liked to keep it down.

She was fearful, troubled, wherefore she scarcely knew, for what might be behind.

(To be continued.)

CYNTHIA'S PERIL.

—30—

CHAPTER V.

"He belongs to one of the oldest Roman families, has captivating manners, and is excessively handsome—as you may see for yourselves."

"A tall, sublime sort of Werter-faced man," laughs Farrant Copley.

As usual, he is close to Firefly, who has seated herself in the verandah after dinner to enjoy the starlight and sweet air.

Penrith, leaning over the balustrade near them listens to their conversation, but takes no part in it. His eyes are fixed on Cynthia, seated by Mrs. Ligonier in the *salon*, with cheeks as white as her gown, and a nervous expression on her fair face.

"By no means," says Firefly, resenting Mr. Copley's familiar quotation. "That suggests the mock heroic, and Count Malespina is a real hero."

"Does Miss Ligonier think so?"

"It is so difficult to tell what Cynthia thinks. She does not look as though she fully appreciated him just now, does she?"

"No; I never saw her look so ill at ease."

"I suppose she believes me at last. We spent Easter in Rome, you know, and the Count was Cynthia's shadow. I always told her he would follow us, but she laughed me to scorn."

"I suppose Miss Ligonier gave him encouragement?" asks Farrant Copley. "I can't understand a girl doing that unless she likes a man—I mean such a girl as your cousin. The coquette one meets in society are quite different."

Firefly's pretty eyebrows contract in an anxious frown, and she pulls impatiently at the swansdown bordering her fan.

"I can't exactly say that Cynthia encouraged him," she answers. "But then, you know, she does not discourage people. She laughs and will not believe they are in earnest."

While Miss Edzell is speaking, Olivia Stanhope joins her, attended, of course, by M. de Morvaix. "So," she says, addressing Firefly, "one of Cynthia's victims has found his way back to her feet. The poor moth is fluttering round the candle again."

"Olivia! how can you speak so of Cynthia! It is shameful."

"Pardon me, mademoiselle," interposes the little banker, "surely you waste your indignation. The Count is not a conquest to be ashamed of. His family are noble and rich—oh, wonderfully rich. A little—eccentric, perhaps. But what of that! Mademoiselle Cynthia's English quiet will calm him down."

There is an expression of almost impish malice on M. de Morvaix's face as he speaks, which makes Herne Penrith long to pitch him over the balustrade, ay, into the very basin of the fountain that gleams so alluring below.

But he resists the temptation.

Presently in the *salon*, there is the usual demand for music. None of Mrs. Ligonier's party ever sing or play there, but the Count, who has been standing before Cynthia and her aunt, seats himself at the piano and sings "*Adieu, mon âme!*" in an exquisite tenor, clear and true, with intense expression.

Meanwhile Miss Ligonier leaves her chair and joins the group in the verandah.

"How deliciously he sings," whispers Firefly.

"I think a man always looks a consummate idiot at the piano," says Herne Penrith, speaking for the first time.

Firefly turns upon him at once.

"That is nonsensical prejudice," she says.

"Why should a man look more foolish sitting down to play, than standing up to sing if he can do it well? And the Count does both to perfection, doesn't he, Cynthia?"

"I—I really don't know," falters the girl. "I have not heard a note. I came out here for air and quiet."

She glances appealingly at Herne Penrith, but he is star-gazing, and takes no heed.

The arrival of Count Malespina interferes sadly with the quartette of friends, Firefly and Farrant Copley, to be sure, pursue their rambles through the shady forests and sunny pastures.

They spend long mornings on the terrace, talking of all things under Heaven, while the girl begins elaborate devices in art needlework, or makes water colour studies of some rich southern flower.

They stroll at night in the colonnade, fragrant with orange and oleander blossoms, watching the stars stud the violet vault with a radiance unknown to northern skies, and renewing the discussions which have for them an endless charm.

They often disagree. Firefly jumps to conclusions in the most womanly way, and announces them with a rapid decision which would be repulsive were she elderly and plain, but which her sweet girlish face and winning manner make quaintly charming.

And then how delicious are the reconciliations! What a time of enchantment it is altogether with its frank companionship, softened by tenderness lurking, as yet unavowed, in both hearts!

But the others—the couple whose friendship has been even sweeter though more troubled—are now sundered entirely. Count Malespina is for ever by Cynthia's side, turn where she will his black eyes meet her or pursue her. If she takes refuge beside her aunt he is in closest, most watchful attendance.

If any other gentleman approaches, his air of haughty aggressive appropriation drives the intruder to a speedy retreat.

Cynthia grows thin and white under this perpetual watchfulness.

One brilliant morning an excursion to Esterel has been arranged by Lady Smith, who has tempted Mrs. Ligonier to accompany her, by pledging herself that the roads are equal to English ones, and that her own well-bung, well-cushioned carriage shall be dedicated to her use.

Cynthia, however, is not of the party. She complains of headache, and has not left her room when they started.

Words could hardly express the relief with which she hears the carriages drive off, and calculates that for six—possibly seven hours—she will be free from the silent importunity which has become so tormenting to her.

If the Count would only speak, and receive his dismissal once for all, it would be better. But he seems to look on her cold and distant manner, her endeavours to escape from his society, as mere womanly caprice, which time will cure.

After a while she ventures into the comparatively empty *salon*, and thence makes her way to the gardens, and the lonely path leading to Mont Tempête.

How delicious are freedom and solitude, the mountain air and the mountain stillness, after the voluntary imprisonment in crowded rooms by which she has endeavoured to avoid the Count.

For nearly an hour Cynthia sits in the rocky recess whence the four friends watched the sunset on their last untroubled evening.

Then she thinks she had better retrace her steps, as there is a long distance to be traversed before she can regain the shelter of her own room.

"It was here," she thinks, on reaching the narrowest and steepest part of the track, where a sheer precipice, thinly covered with dry and slippery herbage, lies on her left hand, and a wall of smooth rock towers on her right—"It was here that he asked me whether companionship would sweeten life's downward way."

She pauses a moment, and looks up, looks

round to imprint every detail of the scene on her mind.

There, before her, blocking her path—a slight smile of cynical triumph curving his lips—stands Count Malespina.

"You look alarmed, Mademoiselle Ligonier," he says, "was it not I whom you expected to meet?"

Indignation at his tone helps Cynthia to regain her composure, but she cannot bring back the blood which has forsaken her cheeks, nor steady the voice in which she replies,—

"I was naturally startled. I thought you had gone to Esterel with the others."

"As if you supposed I could care for any party of which you did not make one! You know me better than that."

"Will you allow me to pass, Count Malespina?"

"Not yet! I grieve to refuse a lady's request, but you and I must have an explanation, mademoiselle. I can never see you alone for one single instant in the hotel or in the gardens—so I must take my opportunity when I find it."

This is what Cynthia wished for—but certainly not here! And there is an angry glitter in the Count's eyes, ill-suppressed excitement in his tones, which makes her heart beat fast.

"You have only yourself to blame, mademoiselle, if you drive me to pursuing you when you had rather be alone. Why do you turn away when I come near you! Why are you deaf when I address you! It was not so in Rome."

"Why do you persist in attentions which you see are unwelcome! It is not dignified—it is not manly."

"Dignified—manly! Cynthia, my soul, what empty words are these in the ears of one who loves! There is nothing in the world I would not barter for your smiles!"

He takes a step forward, as though to grasp her hand.

"Let me pass, sir, I insist!" she cries, indignation overcoming even her alarm at his wild manner.

"Never—never—till you promise to be mine. I will die on this mountain—we will perish together, but you shall not leave it to give yourself to another."

The Count is transformed—his grace, his elaborate courtesy, his southern languor, have disappeared, and a frenzy of excitement, anger, baffled hope, and disappointed love seems to possess him.

"No, no," he cries, extending his arms as if to drag Cynthia from her precarious foothold, "I will not live without you! And if I perish, we will perish together!"

That lonely mountain track is sometimes untraversed from month to month.

The agitated girl gives but one wild hunted glance round in a vain appeal for the help so unlikely to come, and hesitates for a second whether to rush back up the solitary cliff, or to throw herself down its precipitous side.

At that moment someone comes swiftly from below, grasps the Count by the shoulders, swings him round, and placing himself between the Italian and the half-fainting girl, says in a voice of quiet concentrated wrath,—

"Now, Count Malespina, you will reckon with me!"

For one instant the Count seems inclined to make it a question of physical force. But he is unnerved and startled by the suddenness of the attack; he looks at the light athletic figure, the steady eyes and cool determined face of his adversary, and checks the fury which has almost mastered him.

"What right have you, sir, to interfere in this matter?" he asks, in a voice quivering with anger.

"The right of any man to protect a woman from being persecuted and molested."

"Persecuted! molested! *Cielo!* I do but offer her my soul, my life, to take or trample on as she will. And she calls it insult, she turns from me in anger—she whose smile is my heaven; without whom I cannot, I will not endure my most miserable life! She is cruel, perfidious," he cries, speaking with increasing vehemence, as his expressive face changes from

passionate tenderness to passionate rage. "She knew I loved her. She talked to me, she walked with me, she smiled on me. She drew me on towards bliss, only to cast me back into despair."

He ends with almost a shriek of malediction.

Herne Penrith has been watching him closely, something of compassion gradually mingling with the contempt his face at first expressed.

"Eccentric," he thinks, recalling M. de Morvaix's phrase. "Yes, indeed, and something more."

"See, Count," he says, composedly, and not unkindly, "all this rage of yours arises from a mistake—a very natural mistake on your part. You do not understand Englishwomen. They are as free in our country to make friends amongst our sex as their brothers are. But if any question of marriage arises it is a different thing. How could Miss Ligonier imagine that your attentions were serious if you did not address yourself to her aunt—her natural guardian? To withdraw her friendship from you, so long as you spoke only to her, would have been to take for granted what you perhaps might never intend. I cannot presume to say what your position towards each other may be now, but as regards the past you have no right to consider yourself injured."

During this speech, which Penrith had made studiously deliberate and composed, the Count looks from him to Cynthia inquiringly, hesitatingly.

Then with a sudden change of mood he throws himself on his knees before the girl, who with burning cheeks and downcast eyes, is leaning against the rock, and exclaims with tears,—

"My angel, my star, pardon me! The fear of losing you turned my brain. Will you take me, if I have not sinned beyond forgiveness—will you let my life atone?"

"I cannot," she says, in a trembling whisper. "I am grieved that you have so misunderstood me. I cannot be more than your friend."

"Can you never learn to love me! Will not my soul's devotion move you? Is there no hope for me?"

"None!"

"Then welcome death!" he cries, starting to his feet, and rushing down the mountain path. "For henceforth I have no desire to live."

• • • • •

"Oh, follow him!" implores Cynthia, for the first time raising her eyes of forlorn entreaty to Penrith. "See that he does himself no injury."

"Afterwards," he says coldly. "First of all I must take you to the hotel."

And indeed Cynthia cannot dispense with his help—she cannot walk unassisted. Her heart beats as though it would suffocate her; her temples are throbbing violently. Only by the slowest, most careful steps can she complete the descent, even with the support of his arm.

Not till they pause for a moment on reaching level ground is the silence broken. Then Cynthia falters,—

"Mr. Penrith, what would have become of me but for you? How can I ever thank you?"

"By abstaining for the future from 'flirtation on scientific principles,'" he says. "What is play to you may go near, you see, to being death to others."

"You are severe," she replies. "More severe than I deserve. I never dreamt that the Count cared so much for me; but you must not imagine that I shall ever err in that way again. It was too bitterly humiliating to hear myself defended."

Herne Penrith makes no comment, and presently she continues,—

"Sometimes it has even seemed to me that all the mortification or disappointment would be good for those idlers who professed to admire me."

"It can never do good to men to have a blow from the hand they love."

"Love! How few of them even know what it means. In this case," she adds hurriedly, "I did not suppose the feeling was any stronger than in others. I attributed his vehemence to the Italian temper, and then, when he came

here, I got frightened. You heard what M. de Morvaix said the other night?"

"Yes. I think 'eccentric' is not a sufficiently strong word. If he had been in full possession of self-control I should have knocked him down instead of trying to reason with him. But he seemed to be on the verge of madness. You see, Miss Ligonier, when you trifle with people's feelings you are sometimes playing with edged tools."

"I have avoided him as much as possible. Don't think me worse than I am. To-day I fancied I could safely venture out when the Esterel party had gone. I am sure he started with them."

"Yes, but he left them at St. Préd, and so did I. I thought you might possibly be annoyed."

He speaks with studied coldness, but how grateful she is for his care, his protection!

They are walking through the gardens now, and though, for all conscious impression made on her senses at the time, they might as well be crossing some Arabian; to her dying day certain scents and certain colours will always recall the bitter sweetness of this hour of her deepest humiliation—her most profound remorse—her strongest love.

Yes, she can no longer conceal it from herself. She loves the man, whose feeling for her is still an enigma. That he is not indifferent to her she is certain. But with his watchful interest is mingled strong disapproval. Which will conquer?

In the colonnade Mr. Penrith scrawls a few lines in his pocket-book, tears out the leaf, and hands it to Cynthia.

"Will you give this to Farrant Copley when they come back!" he asks. "It is quite unnecessary to say more than that Malespina has left the hotel suddenly, and I have followed him. I will not leave him till he is in safe hands."

"Thank you—thank you," she says, brokenly. "What shall I not owe to you? If—if any tragedy were to happen I should feel guilty of murder."

She watches him down the steps; then he suddenly returns.

"There is one thing I had almost forgotten," he adds, hurriedly. "This is yours, is it not? I think I have seen you wear it. I picked it up at the foot of Mont Tempête."

And he watches her keenly, closely, as he hands her a gold locket with a forget-me-not in turquoise and pearl on the back.

The colour flies to Cynthia's cheeks as she takes it, mechanically putting up her other hand to her throat, and feeling for the velvet she usually wears.

"The glass and the spring are broken, you see," says Mr. Penrith.

"Oh, that does not matter at all. I am only too glad to get back the portrait. It was my cousin's parting gift when he went to Madeira. He is a great invalid, and we sometimes fear he will never be strong enough to come home."

"Indeed," says Mr. Penrith, whose manner grows more and more frigid as excitement restores Cynthia's natural ease, "I am glad to restore what you prize so much."

Then he turns away again, and this time he does not come back.

When Farrant Copley returns from Esterel he is dismayed by the note Cynthia gives him, and would at once start in pursuit of the absentees if he had the slightest clue to the direction they had taken.

M. de Morvaix smiles disagreeably, and says he is not at all surprised at the Count's flight.

"They are all like that—all the Malespinas. All eccentrics," he says, with a covert sneer.

"Poor Cynthia!" exclaims Olivia Stanhope, mockingly. "What a horrid thing to have a mad lover! Did you bring on the crisis, my dear?"

CHAPTER VI.

FOUR days—to Cynthia an eternity of suspense—and still there are no tidings of the Count. On the evening of the fifth, Herne Penrith strolls quietly up to the entrance of the Hôtel

Crèveœur, as cheerful, as *bien habillé*, as much at his ease as though he had only left it to smoke a cigar.

The usual groups of loungers are scattered about languidly looking for something to interest them, and he is surrounded by questioners, and deafened with questions.

He parries their attacks very lightly.

"Oh, I soon came up with Maléspina," he says, carelessly. "I had noticed the direction he took. Well, yes, I had a toughish struggle once. He was exceedingly anxious to try a perpendicular jump of some fifty feet or so, poor fellow. But all's well that ends well. I got him into a very decent house at Savonne, where there is a resident doctor; and telegraphed to Rome for his brother. So now he is all right."

"I am glad you are all right, old fellow," says Farrant Copley, grasping his hand. "It was a plucky thing to do."

"Was the unfortunate Count very violent, Mr. Penrith?" asks Mrs. Ligonier.

"Did he rave?"

"Has he brain fever?"

"Will he ever get over it?" cry the chorus of the curious.

"If I were to wait to answer all your questions," says Mr. Penrith, good-humouredly disengaging himself, "I should be late for dinner, and that, I assure you, I should regret."

In the dim corridor beyond the *salon* someone is waiting for him—someone who could not trust herself to speak within reach of other ears.

Her eyes are brimming with tears, and her voice trembles as she tries to thank him.

Herne Penrith listens in utter silence.

Cynthia thinks he is still angry with her. She cannot see the expression of his face—she is turning dejectedly away, when he moves suddenly to her side, seizes the hand she had a moment before extended to greet him, and presses it fondly to his lips.

In another second he is gone, and Cynthia returns to the *salon*, startled, silent, and happy.

That night, as Farrant Copley and Penrith are walking up and down the terrace smoking, the latter breaks out, after a long interval of silence,—

"Look here, dear boy, this *must* come to an end."

"What must?" asks Copley, starting from a deep reverie of which Firefly formed the subject.

"Oh, you know! This tomfoolery of ours. I can't think now, for my own part, what could have possessed us to begin it. I promised to keep it up as long as you did, but lately it's been a struggle, I can tell you. Now I *must* speak."

"I'm sorry it has turned out such a nuisance to you," says his friend, penitently. "You see we neither of us dreamt of things getting serious; and now—I am not a coward in general, I believe—but sometimes I think I shall never dare to tell Firefly."

Penrith groans.

"What will it be for me then?" he exclaims. "But the longer we leave it the worse it will be for both of us. Make up your mind to get it over, dear boy."

"He either fears his fate too much,
Or his desert is small,
Who dares not put it to the touch,"

and so on, you know."

"Oh, but Montrose wasn't—wasn't a confounded humbug," says Farrant Copley, savagely. "You cannot think what a hold that little girl has got over me, nor how I dread making myself ridiculous in her eyes. If I should lose her—"

"I don't suppose you will. But I honestly believe that every hour of further delay now increases the possibility of it."

Another long pause follows, during which Farrant Copley takes two or three impatient turns on the terrace.

"Perhaps you are right," he says, coming back to his friend's side at last. "Well, then,

by this time to-morrow we will make a clean breast of it."

"Cynthia!" cries Firefly, next day, stretching her pretty head far over the balcony—that balcony in which the girls were sitting when Herne Penrith and Farrant Copley, approaching the hospitable doors of the Hôtel Crèveœur, looked up and saw the three fair faces framed in flowers.

"Cynthia, it is such a heavenly morning! Isn't it a sin to waste so much of it over that tedious breakfast? Let us run away. We can tell Lisette to put up some cake and fruit, and carry it into the woods, and have a long morning in peace."

"What will Aunt Ella say?"

"Oh, she won't mind. She will have Olivia to amuse her, and all the men. We shall be home before dinner time. Fancy this glorious sunshine filtering through the pines and arbutus!"

Cynthia yields, though with some reluctance. Like most people, she is accustomed to yield to Firefly. Besides, she is not altogether sorry to postpone her meeting with Mr. Penrith.

Last night, after those bewildering moments in the corridor, she scarcely saw him. This morning she does not know how she will meet him. Yet she looks for him with mingled hope and fear, in the rooms and gardens through which she and her cousin pass, and her heart sinks with a vague foreboding when at last the woods are reached, and she has not caught sight of him.

She reclines on the thick moss by Miss Esdell's side, watching her busy fingers, but herself making no attempt to draw, or read, or even talk.

Growing calmer in the solitude, she is content to listen to the faint rustle of the breeze among the topmost branches of the leafy canopy, and the soft hum of the insects, to the wild note or fluttering wing of a bird.

Content to watch the flickering lights and shades, the innumerable tints of the foliage, the delicate hues of the wood-flowers—content to let all the questions so busy at her heart an hour ago be lulled into temporary oblivion.

Suddenly Cynthia starts from the reverie which the warmth of the southern noon has almost deepened into sleep, with a strange impression of terror and grief. She thinks she hears Herne Penrith's voice calling her.

"Firefly," she cries, springing to her feet, "let us go back. Let us return at once."

"Why?" asks her cousin, in blank astonishment.

"Oh," says Cynthia, confusedly, "it must be getting late, and we shall be wanted. I am sure, I am convinced, we are wanted."

"Nonsense! There is plenty of time yet. You have been asleep and dreaming. Wait just half an hour—one little half hour. It will be so hot crossing the meadows now, and I must finish these trees. Why do you want to go in such a hurry?"

And Cynthia, ashamed to explain her real reason, equally ashamed to invent one, sinks back on her mossy couch, and lets opportunity go by.

Meantime there is bustle and confusion at the Hôtel Crèveœur.

Horses are being put to, waiters are hurrying about, M. and Madame Alain, with faces of grave concern, are making their adieux to two departing guests.

"Where is Miss Ligonier?" asks Herne Penrith, abruptly breaking into a knot of giggling *soubrettes*.

"Mademoiselle went for a morning walk some hours ago, monsieur—it is not known where."

"And Miss Esdell?"

"Accompanied her cousin."

"Can Mrs. Ligonier see me?"

"Madame is driving with Mademoiselle Stanhope. They are not expected to return till dinner-time."

Mr. Penrith utters an impatient exclamation. "If I could only have had one word with them Which is their maid?"

A compassionate *soubrette* volunteers to fetch her, and Lisette appears immediately, dimpling with smiles and bridling with importance.

"Be so good as to tell Miss Ligonier that we have had telegrams calling us back to England. My friend's father is dangerously ill. Say we have looked everywhere for them in vain. We will write—"

"My dear fellow," cries Farrant Copley, rushing down the steps, knapsack in hand, "the horses are put in; there is not one instant to spare if we are to catch the next train."

Lisette promises, with many protestations of regret to explain everything to her young mistresses; a piece of gold is slipped into her hand by way of reminder. People hurry to the colonnade to say good-bye to the travellers.

The two young men look round in a last vain effort to catch a parting glimpse of the only faces they wish to see again, but they are far away.

The postillion cracks his whip, the wheels revolve, and the journey is begun which will carry them from happiness and the south, to England and sorrow.

CHAPTER VII.

It is nearly a year since the friends assembled at the Hôtel Crèveœur were parted so suddenly.

The then bay window of a large and richly furnished room where the latest developments of æstheticism are ingeniously combined with the newest contrivances for comfort, Cynthia Ligonier and Firefly are talking away the idle hour between afternoon tea and dressing for dinner.

Cynthia is paler and more pensive than of old, while Firefly's brilliance has a feverish glow, and her spirits are forced and fitful. In character the girls seem in some respects to have changed places.

Cynthia shrinks from admiration, and even from notice, and represses the faintest approach to *attentissement* with a cold gentleness against which there is no appeal.

Firefly, on the contrary, who used to regard sentiment and small attentions with the frankest contempt, now seems anxious to attract, jealous of homage, as though her confidence in herself has been shaken, and tributes to her grace and beauty, valueless in themselves, could soothe her wounded pride.

"I heard from Olivia de Morvaix to-day," she says, after a short silence.

"Indeed! Has she begun to verify the old adage yet?"

"About marrying in haste! No, I think not. I don't suppose she ever will repent unless her husband's bank breaks. After all, I fancy Olivia is the best off of the three of us. She has everything she cares for, money, even rank of a sort—you know the hideous little man has been ennobled! social influence, and her little world at her feet. They gave a banquet to the King and Queen of Italy last month, and Olivia's diamonds outshone her Majesty's. Here is her portrait in all her grandeur."

And Firefly throws a large photograph into her cousin's lap.

Cynthia takes it up and studies it attentively.

"I think, Firefly, it must be better to be disappointed than to attain one's ideal, when it is such a sordid one as this. Who would have imagined, when we were all speculating about our future lot last year, that a few months would see Olivia married—and so married!"

"Strange things happen in a few months, don't they?" answers Firefly, with a tinge of bitterness often heard in her voice now. "Well, Cynthia, there is another marriage decided upon, which, I suppose, will please you just as little."

Cynthia starts from her seat.

"Oh, Firefly! do not tell me—you do not mean—" she falters, unwilling to put her dread into words.

"I mean that I have at last accepted my cousin. Why should I not?" she asks, looking straight at Cynthia, and speaking with perfect calmness, but with cheeks from which every vestige of colour has vanished.

"Because you do not love him."

"Well, but I love no one! and I have a very

strong affection for Cedric. I admire him, I esteem him—I shall be happier with him than with anyone else."

"Firefly, it is not in your nature to be happy in marriage without love."

"It may not have been, at one time," answers the girl, idly; "but all that has been killed in me. Love—real love—only comes once. It has come and gone; and now all I have to do is to make the best of life without it. Oh, I did love once!" she says, with a quick change of manner from coldness to passionate pain. "He made me love him! He gave me every assurance of his own love but the formal words—and then he humiliated me by desertion; by long, absolute neglect! Don't you see, Cynthia, that I would do anything to forget! If I were a Romanist, and if it were not for papa, I would go into a convent. As it is, I shall marry. Hundreds of girls do it."

"I never thought you would."

"Nor did I. How little we know ourselves. Sometimes I think it cannot be my real self, looking forward to such a future as this. I must have left my real self buried in the Orvé-ocur gardens, when Aunt Ella insisted on our coming away and no letter had arrived. But I am a wretch to talk to you like this, Cynthia, as if I were the only one with a grief to bear."

She is not, indeed, the only one; but their griefs are very differently borne. Cynthia cannot speak of hers. It is at once too sacred, and too sore.

"But, Firefly," she remonstrates presently, "you have spoken only of yourself. There are others to be thought of."

"Have I not thought of them? It is more, far more for my father's sake than my own that I have consented. It makes him miserable when he thinks that he may have to leave me (and my fortune—money is so important Cynthia) unprotected in this wicked world. And he has always thought of Cedric almost as a son, you know."

"Cedric—yes. Do you think it is fair to him to marry without love?"

"Quite fair in this case. He knows exactly what I feel for him, and he is satisfied to take me—and my fortune—on those terms. No, I will not be unjust," she adds. "I honestly believe he would be quite as willing to take me without my fortune. He is fond of me, poor fellow—and above all things anxious to please my father. So we have settled it."

"Oh, Firefly," cries Cynthia, with tears, "I entreat you, do not let this go on—I am certain you will not be happy. You are blind and desperate now, but some day you will see the folly, and worse than folly, of what you are doing."

"Don't try and shake my resolution. Heaven knows I waited long enough."

"Of course," answers Cynthia, with agitation. "I can understand that it seems long to you. But after all, in actual time it is not so very long."

"Not so very long—ten months!" repeats Firefly, impatiently. "Not so very long, in these days, to keep me without a line—a word! Do you mean to tell me that if you cared for anyone ever so little, anything in the world could make you keep them ten months waiting for a sign from you?"

Cynthia sighs. The last frail fragment of her own edifice of hope falls beneath Firefly's attack. Still, she will not entirely yield.

"But," she gently persists, "supposing for one moment that something of which we have no knowledge has prevented Mr. Copley from writing to you."

"Would it have hindered his friend also?" asks Firefly, and her cousin is silenced at last. "No, dear Cynthia, depend upon it it is useless to struggle. We must accept the inevitable. You do not suppose it was easy to me to yield! But I felt I was growing worse every day—more bitter, more suspicious, more selfish—I was, indeed, not made to live alone! And I have never been accustomed to neglect—I have grown so used to being loved! So I thought as my own life was simply worthless to myself I would make the best I could of it for others."

Noble, wasn't it? But at all events I have pleased my father and Cedric."

"And does Cedric know that you love another?"

"Have I not told you that I love no one! He knows that I do not love him, schoolgirl fashion. He is quite content with my affection."

"And he knows nothing about last year?"

"Cynthia, are you bent on torturing me? No, of course not. Papa knows everything, and he said there was no necessity for telling Cedric. No young man would care to be bored with a story without an end like that. The best thing to do was to forget it myself as soon as possible. Forget!" repeats Firefly, bitterly; "if I only could! But I shall have a better chance of it, shall I not, in a new life! Cynthia, don't be hard with me. You are too good and patient yourself even to imagine what I have gone through this year."

Cynthia is prevented from answering by the entrance of the bridegroom elect, and she looks at him with pitying interest as she wonders whether he will really be able to make himself happy with the measure of regard which Firefly has to bestow upon him.

That young lady herself escapes from the room. However strong she may think she is in her new resolutions, the old memories awakened by her conversation with Cynthia make it difficult for her to meet Cedric.

"Well, Miss Ligonier," he inquires presently, with a smile, "is my first sitting over?"

"I beg your pardon," says Cynthia, starting, "I did not mean quite to stare you out of countenance; I was studying you in a new character, you see."

"One to which I am myself hardly accustomed," he says, walking up to the window, and taking the chair vacated by Firefly.

"I hope you will be happy in it."

"I hope I may make Firefly happy—that is the chief thing. I know I am not exactly the 'idol of her thoughts.' But it often turns out, I believe, a bad speculation to marry one's idol."

"Do you think with Mrs. Malaprop that it is best to 'begin with a little aversion'?"

"I don't go quite so far as that; but it is certainly better to begin with it than to end with it, and while a romantic passion, as it is called, sometimes turns into aversion, an average goodwill is often a lasting and expanding quality. I do not despair of its proving so in our case."

And Cynthia thinks, looking critically at him as he stands there—evidently quite heart-whole and fancy-free himself—with his bright intelligent face and winning manner, that his confidence might have been justified if only there had not been another image stamped indelibly on Firefly's memory, the image of one pale, sensitive, refined—so unlike this handsome prosperous cousin that Cedric's very personal advantages are likely to weigh against him in the comparison.

CHAPTER VIII.

"I will never leave Lyndale so long as I live, never!" cries Maud Penrith, throwing herself down before the fire and pillowing her head on the shaggy back of the old retriever who shares the hearthrug with her.

"Never is a long day, Miss Maud."

"Of course it is, nurse; but not a minute too long. I never did live anywhere else, and I never will."

"People sometimes change their minds."

"Some people do—we don't. All the Penriths are firm enough. Sometimes we are called loyal, sometimes obstinate, but never fickle."

"Things change people's lives if they don't change their minds, dear," pronounces Mrs. Wills, oracularly.

"What do you mean, nurse? What are you thinking of?" asks Maud, fixing eager terrified eyes on the old woman. "Horne has quite, quite got over his illness. You don't think he is looking worse to-day?"

The young seldom realize death till he has

stepped within their circle. But when that is once broken the feeling of security is gone, and for a time he seems to lurk in every shadow.

Maud Penrith is wearing the first mourning gown she can remember. And her heart grows chill with sudden unreasonable fear as she listens to her nurse.

"No, no, my dear; I didn't mean that. But there's other things besides illness and death. There's marriage, Miss Maud."

"Marriage?" echoed the girl, scornfully. "I shall never marry. Why should I? I would not change my name for a coronet—I would not leave my home for a palace."

"It's home where the heart is, Miss Maud."

"And my heart is here, and always will be. I love every stone in the walls—every inch of the turf on the land. I don't believe I could breathe anywhere else. I shall be Maud Penrith of Lyndale to my dying day."

The old woman smiles at the girl's vehemence, and resumes, drily,—

"And suppose Mr. Horne was to marry, dear?"

For a moment Maud's countenance changes. A startled, pained expression gleams from her eyes, and trembles round her mouth.

"Why do you put such fancies in my mind, nurse? You are bent on frightening me. You have not heard anything! You don't think—but how should you! Of course Horne would have told me first of all. Besides, who is there about here that he could marry?"

"Not just here, nor just directly, I dare say. But Mr. Horne will go about more by-and-by. And then he will see some lady he would like to marry. It's only natural."

"I suppose it would be only natural," repeats the girl, slowly; "but he must marry some one that I shall love almost as much as he does; and I shall live here with them and be Horne's right hand—just as I have always been. He couldn't do without me. And the people couldn't do without me, nor the horses, nor the dogs—could you, Bruno? Why, nurse, what a wicked, unnatural old woman you must be to hint at such a thing!"

Mrs. Wills smiles and shakes her head, and then her attention is engrossed by the heel of the stocking she is knitting, while Maud resumes her intent gaze into the glowing embers, and her day-dreams of the long, useful, happy life she and Horne are to lead amongst their own people—till a knock at the door makes her spring to her feet, as the old butler peers dubiously into the semi-darkness.

"Is Miss Maud here, Mrs. Wills? Master wishes to speak to her. He is in the library."

"There, nurse," Maud cries, triumphantly, "did not I tell you so! Horne can't do without me for an hour. How do you suppose he could do without me all his life?"

And down from the old nursery she flies, with a step that has begun to recover its lightness after long months of intense anxiety and then of bitter grief, during which she moved slowly and sadly about the house, thinking only of her father.

The library is but partly lit up, but to Maud, fresh from the twilight dimness of the nursery, it looks brilliant; and she shades her dazzled eyes with one hand, as she says gaily,—

"Here I am, Horne. I'm so glad you sent for me. Did you find sorting those old papers dull work alone, dear boy?"

But while she is speaking her brother lifts his head and turns towards her, and the girlish merriment dies on her lips.

"Oh, Horne, what can have happened!" she asks in a breathless whisper, approaching him and laying her hand timidly on his arm, "you look as if you had seen a ghost."

Her brother does not answer her immediately. He puts her gently into an armchair—their father's special chair, as Maud remembers, with a pang—and stands beside her with his hand on hers; and Maud, with a caressing movement, lays her cheek on it.

The brother and sister resemble each other much, yet differ more. Both have tall, graceful figures, but the slightness of the girl takes nothing from her activity and vigour; whilst

that of the young man seems to betray constitutional languor. Both have refined features, dark blue eyes deeply set under well-defined eyebrows, and wavy hair. But Maud's cheek is rounded by health, whilst Herne's pale face is severely thin. Both show their race in the curve of the lip and the carriage of the head, but Maud's look is bright and spirited, whilst her brother's, at all times thoughtful, has now deepened into gloom. At last he rouses himself to answer her.

"I have had a greater shock than seeing any ghost could give me, Maud. I don't think it would be a kindness to beat about the bush—"

"No, no—tell me at once, whatever it is."

"Well—I have discovered that we may soon be beggars, because we are now what is worse—usurpers."

For a moment Maud looked at him in astonishment, too great for words. She would as soon have expected the solid earth to give way beneath her feet as such a speech to pass his lips.

"Herne, it is incredible. We are Penrichs! You must have lost your senses."

"I wish I had, Maud—for there you, at all events, would be safe. It was the first shock of this knowledge quite as much as the long anxiety about our poor father which caused my illness. Then after I began to get better, it was long before I could summon courage to face the thing. And I would not disturb you by any hint of coming trouble till I had made investigations, which all go to confirm it."

Then for a few seconds there is silence—silence which seems to last for hours, but which Maud dares not break. It is the first time in her young life that she has felt the formless, vague, sickening dread which parches the throat and chokes the voice.

"I cannot talk of it yet, even to you!" exclaims Herne, at last. "Read that letter, Maud—I think you will understand it." And he walks away to the mantelpiece and hides his face in his folded arms.

It is a lawyer's letter he has put in his sister's hands, and for some time she cannot disentangle any meaning from its wordy intricacies. But at length she utters an exclamation of dismay.

"Oh, Herne! Can it be true?"

"I fear so."

"What are we to do?"

"Give up everything, of course. I have sent for Burnett—he knows more of our family history than I."

"Had you ever the faintest idea of such a thing?"

"Not till I began to examine my father's papers. It is a crushing blow."

"My dearest Herne!" cries Maud, going to his side, and throwing her arms round him, "it may be all quite false, and even if we have lost everything else we still have each other, and we are young and strong—we shall find plenty of ways of getting on. I would do anything—anything in the world for you!"

"My poor child. You little know what you are talking about. What could you do? Or I either, for that matter! It will be ruin, I tell you."

Maud is silent. She cannot shut her eyes to the extent of the threatened misfortune. Her old nurse told her that home was where the heart was, and how could they ever tear their hearts from Lyndale?

Nothing more is said till the entrance of the lawyer, whom Herne, after a struggle with himself, greets quietly.

"Did you ever hear that my grandfather had a brother?" he asks, when Mr. Burnett is seated.

"To be sure I did; he was killed in a skating accident, and your grandfather succeeded to the estate."

"Yes, I know—that was Huntley, the eldest son. My grandfather was the third son, it appears. I am speaking of the second son."

"I have certainly seen his name on your genealogical tree," says Mr. Burnett, after a pause. "I always understood that he was wild and reckless, squandered his money, emigrated, and died abroad."

"Then there really was such a person? I did not know it."

"Well, you see, he was not much talked about. Not considered exactly a credit to the family."

"It would appear, however, that he married, and has left descendants."

"My dear sir," exclaimed the startled lawyer, "are you sure of that? And do you realize what it would involve?"

"There seems little room for doubt. What do you think of that letter?"

Mr. Burnett gives a troubled glance at Maud, who, white and still as marble, listens intently to every word.

"You can speak freely before my sister," says Herne, answering the look, and he moves to Maud's side and leans on the back of her chair, while the lawyer deliberately reads the letter twice.

"It is a curious affair," he says at last, "a very curious affair. Did you happen to recognise the writer's name? I dare say not. But it is very familiar to me. Several years ago he was a junior clerk in our office, where, I am sorry to say, he must have learnt enough of your family affairs to give you this annoyance. He went to Canada as soon as he was his own master, and no doubt figures as a great English lawyer."

"I had entirely forgotten him," says Herne, carelessly. "But the question is whether his story is true."

"Precisely," agrees Mr. Burnett. "But don't you see what the rascal is driving at? Somehow or other he has, or pretends he has, come upon traces of an elder branch of your family. And he asks, almost in so many words, what price he may expect for keeping his information to himself. I suppose your father never answered him?"

"Mr. Burnett!"

"My dear sir, he might have replied if only to bid Hallett do his worst. You have not come on any memorandum of such an answer!"

"None whatever. Besides, my father must have received this letter very shortly before his illness—his last illness."

"True; and that was nearly a year ago. And, receiving no answer, Hallett would probably go—the lawyer checks himself, looking much disturbed.

"Then, I may presume," says Herne, "that it is, to say the least of it, possible that neither my father nor I had any right here, and the sooner the real owner takes possession the better."

"Gently, gently my dear sir; assume nothing. It is for the claimant, if there be one, and as yet we have only the statement of an interested third party, to prove his right, and after such a lapse of time I imagine it would be difficult."

"Do you also imagine," interrupts Herne, with excitement, "that I shall remain passively here, waiting to be turned out? No, indeed! Nor will I stoop to any correspondence with this Hallett. I shall go and look into the facts myself."

"Prepared to throw away this fine property on any one claiming to be your distant cousin?"

"Prepared," says Herne, more quietly, "to resign it to any one who can prove that he has a better right to it than I."

Maud puts her hand up to her brother, and murmurs a word of fond approval.

The old lawyer who has known and loved them all their lives, walks up and down the room.

"Look here, Mr. Penrich," he says presently, "you are an excellent young man, but, pardon me, you know little of the world, and care nothing for your own interests. If you move in the matter alone you may be victimised by a conspiracy. Wait till I can put my business in such a train that it may be left, and I will go with you, and see that even if you are beaten you are not cheated. A month or two more can matter little. Agree to this for your sister's sake, if not for your own. You have no particular wish to hand over her birthright to a fellow who may be—"

"Who may easily be a better fellow than I," interposes Herne, with a forced smile.

But he yields. He cannot gainsay the valuable

help Mr. Burnett may give in his painful inquiries. So there is nothing for the brother and sister to do at present but the hardest thing of all at their age—to wait.

CHAPTER IX.

LYNDAL, so beloved by the brother and sister whose birthplace it was, is not a handsome building by any means, but it looks like a home. Its old grey towers owe all their picturesqueness to the ample mantle of ivy with which they are draped, and all their interest to the memories of the many generations of Penrichs they have sheltered. Its rooms are large and well proportioned, lined with old portraits, and filled with furniture so old—and also so costly and well preserved—as to be quite in fashion again.

The grounds are extensive, but they retain little beauty at this season, when an unusually stormy autumn has stripped them of every trace of verdure except what is regarded by turf and evergreens.

The situation of Lyndale is wild and lonely, and Herne and Maud, whose mother died when they were infants, and whose father never recovered any inclination for society, have no intimate friends among their few neighbours. Fortunately the brother and sister have always been sufficient to each other. Even school and college, which brought more variety into the boy's life, never weakened this close alliance.

All that Maud knew of the outer world, with its ambitions and interests, she learnt from Herne—and young men are as fond of teaching as girls are of learning. On the other hand, Maud represented home to her brother, giving him, besides her bright companionship, the watchful tenderness with which sisters often try to fill the place of a lost mother.

Nothing has ever come between them yet—no rivalry, no misunderstanding, no divided interest. And bitterly though Maud dreads leaving her old home, no future can look utterly dark to her in which her brother has passed. She suffers most from seeing his suffering. If he would only confide in her—talk of their future—form some idea of how to face it, Maud would be so relieved. But he spends his days in long objectless walks and rides over miles of desolate country, his evenings in silent reverie.

"Herne," Maud begins, one wild morning when the weather is too tempestuous even for him to brave, and she has sat watching the weary figure motionless in an armchair, and listening to the beating of rain against the windows till she can endure it no longer, "Herne, do let us speak of our trouble; it will be easier to bear. Don't give way so utterly. Our home is as dear to me as it can be to you, and I know there may be great hardships coming upon us. But after all, the house and the fortune are not everything. The future may have some good in store for us that we foresee as little as we foresee the evil which we are now dreading."

"The future!" repeats Herne, with mournful bitterness. "I have no future now, my child. But I was not thinking of that. I was thinking of the past!"

"The past!"

"Yes; you did not know I had any past, except childhood, did you? Maud, you little dream how much I shall lose with this change of fortune. I could not talk or even think of my own hopes and prospects by our poor father's deathbed. Then came the first glimmering of the truth, when I looked over his papers, then my own long illness. And now everything is being snatched from me."

"I had, indeed, little idea that you had other troubles kept from me!" says Maud, looking at her brother with pained surprise.

"But these concern myself alone, at least—"

"How could that be? What concerns you must concern me also. Tell me all now, or I shall not know a moment's peace—I shall imagine all sorts of horrors."

"I suppose now I have told you anything I had better tell you everything," answers Herne, yielding with a sigh to the relief of speech when

the ice is once broken. "You know that when you telegraphed for me to come home I was staying at the Hôtel Crèveccour, with Farrant Copley. Well, among the people in the Hôtel there was a girl—"

Maud can hardly repress a little cry of dismay. But she stifles the exclamation lest she should hear no more.

"Maud, she was the most exquisite creature I ever saw. Firefly they called her, and she was just as bright and glowing as a firefly. The evening that we arrived we happened to overhear her saying that she would never marry a rich man, and talking with just the self-sacrificing fervour I always fancied a real woman, unspotted by the world, ought to feel. Farrant said I had found my ideal, and chance put it into our power to test her sincerity—happy young fools that we were—by a sort of *Midsummer Night's Dream* confusion of our identity. We little thought of all it would lead to—it was 'Love in Idleness,' indeed!"

Herne Penrith pauses, his voice and face softened by regretful tenderness. In memory he is again living through those fleeting hours.

"Please go on," entreats Maud, in a tone of concentrated pain her brother is too self-engrossed to notice.

"Well, Firefly was with her aunt, a Mrs. Ligonier, who, strangely enough, had been a schoolfellow of our mother's. She was struck by my name when we were announced, but pitched upon Farrant Copley as being me, because of the supposed family likeness in his dark face to her friend—we are not in the least like our mother, you know—we are like the fair Penriths—and we did not deceive her. So I won my darling's warm romantic heart—I know I won hers, as surely as I know that I lost my own, though no formal explanation ever took place between us. She thought me a poor artist, and I trusted to be able to make her forgive me for being rich, and intended the very day on which your telegram arrived to tell her all."

"And have you never written to her?"

"How could I! Was it a time for love-letters! And then, when I had begun to think of the future, came the shock of finding that I should, in all probability, be penniless."

"But, Herne, if she loved you"—poor Maud! how hard it is to her to think of anyone but herself having a right to love her brother!—"if she loved you believing you to be a poor man, she will not be so inconsistent as to throw you over because you *really* are one."

"But how can I ask for her love now! What would her people say! She is very rich. Would not they naturally think I was trying to mend my broken fortunes with her money! If I were even the artist she supposed me—if I had any career—any prospect—before me, I might dare to appeal to her generous nature against the natural opposition of her friends. But I cannot be a helpless pensioner on her bounty. Now you see, Maud, why the blow has been so overwhelming."

Yes, Maud sees; and she is sorry for him. But in those first moments of insight it must be owned that she is yet more "sorry for herself."

Like Herne, she has now lost everything. The love and confidence, armed with which she could defy any external loss, all have failed her.

She can never again be the first object with Herne, as he has always been with her. The visions which in her untried buoyancy and energy she had begun to form, of working together and making a little home where they may grow content and peaceful, are swept away.

How can Herne ever be content with any success they are likely to attain! Henceforth he will have griefs which Maud is powerless to console, just as he has had joys in which she took no part.

Slowly, sadly, she goes up to her own room, and stands at the window, seeing little of the driving clouds on which her eyes are fixed till the worst violence of the storm has abated.

Then she thinks she will go out; it will be a relief to be moving, to get away from the load of pain and fear which oppresses her, if only by tiring herself so much that she will cease to think of it.

She is soon on her way to visit one or two poor

pensioners in the village, thinking sadly as she goes how few more opportunities she may have of helping them.

Once amongst the cottagers she finds it difficult to get away again.

Most of them have known her from childhood, and all are eager for a word with the bright girl whose pleasant manner has done quite as much to make her popular as her open hand.

The early autumn twilight is gathering in when at last she turns homewards, and she starts violently as a hasty step is heard in pursuit, and a detaining hand is laid on her shoulder.

"Excuse me, Miss Penrith," gasps a well-known voice, "but you walk so fast that you don't leave me breath enough to follow and speak too! and I particularly want a word with you."

"As many as you please, Dr. Wood," replies the girl, heartily.

"I want to ask you to look after that brother of yours a little. He is overdoing it with exercise. I meet him wherever I go—at all distances and in all weathers. I know you are not one of those hysterical girls who fancy they can make up in nerves for their want of common-sense, so you will not be frightened if I remind you that over-exertion is the worst thing in the world for your brother's constitution."

"Do you mean," asks Maud, trying hard not to discredit the doctor's eulogium, "that Herne has the same complaint as my father?"

"Not the active disease, but the tendency strongly pronounced. Now you haven't a trace of it, your constitution is that of your mother's family, but all the Penriths have weak hearts, and you must persuade your brother to take more care of himself—a promising young man like that, with such a career before him."

At these words, which sound like a mockery of the hidden trouble weighing on Maud, her forced composure gives way, and she bursts into tears.

"My dear Miss Maud," exclaims the doctor, in alarm, "I did not intend to frighten you. You must not suppose your brother is in any immediate danger. I wish I had cautioned him; only sometimes one does the very mischief one wants to prevent."

"It was not what you said that made me so foolish, Dr. Wood," Maud answers, as soon as she can speak. "At least, it was not *only* that. It just added a little more anxiety to a great load I have to bear at present. I can't explain myself now, I can only ask you to forgive me. I am grateful for your warning."

And shaking hands with her old friend, Maud quickens her pace to avoid the storm which has gathered again more heavily than before.

With acute anxiety she finds that Herne, who left the house before she did, has not returned. By this time rain is falling in blinding sheets, accompanied by the crash of distant thunder.

Maud leaves untasted the tea which is brought to her, refuses lights, and moves restlessly from one window of the long drawing-room to the other, vainly trying to penetrate the darkness of night and storm.

Every kind of fear—every wild conjecture—fills her excited fancy, and she is on the point of ordering all the men servants to go in search of their master, when she hears the tramp of slow and heavy steps up the avenue, and rushes into the hall, filled with sickening dread for Herne, just in time to meet a group which turns her vague fear into wildest horror.

Four men from the mill are carrying on a rude stretcher a motionless figure. The face is covered, and water is streaming from the saturated clothes.

Maud cannot stir, cannot speak. She is gazing fixedly at the covered face, not daring to move a fold of the cloth, not able to ask a question—when the door again opens, and Herne himself stands on the threshold.

"Oh, thank Heaven, thank Heaven, you are safe!" cries his sister, springing towards him. "I thought—I feared that was you. But what is this, Herne!" as he presses into the lighted hall. "You are soaked with wet, and your head is bleeding!"

"It is nothing, Maud. I fished a man out of

the mill-stream, and struck my forehead against the root of a tree on the bank. I shall be all right in a few minutes, but I fear this poor fellow will not. Send for nurse, will you, and have him taken to a room with a fire in it. Let one of the men put Black Douglas in the dog-cart and fetch Dr. Wood at once."

It is long since Maud has seen her brother so animated, so interested, so much like himself. But when the doctor arrives he shakes his head at Herne, and orders him to bed before he will even look at his other patient.

(To be continued.)

HIS BRAVE RESOLVE.

—101—

(Continued from page 321.)

"I never had a letter from you in my life, Mab. Do you think I would have left it unanswered?"

"I gave it to Bee, she promised she would send it."

In his heart Kenneth knew why his cousin had suppressed it, but he could not say so to Mab.

"I gave it her the day after we left Normanhurst, and I have been expecting you ever since. Oh, Kenneth, the days were so long and weary, when each one passed without bringing you."

His task was getting harder and harder, but he made an effort.

"I have wronged you cruelly, Mab. I ought never to have come from Normanhurst. I ought not to be here now."

"Why not?"

"Because—oh, my darling, why do you make me say it—because long ago I gave up my right of loving you. I put another in the place I want for you."

"No," and the girl's voice was firm and clear, "that was what I wanted you to know, Kenneth; I could not tell it you, it was so hard to say, and so I wrote it. . . . I am your wife!"

"My wife!"

"The neglected girl, the foolish child you married. Oh, Ken, I was more foolish than you know of, for I loved you even then, when you left me at Richmond. I took a solemn oath that my life's aim should be to win your love."

"Mab!"

"Have I won it?"

"I can hardly realise anything, I only know that you are dearer to me than all the world."

"I was playing for high stakes," said Mab, with a trace of her old archness, "but fortune favoured me and I have won."

"But how did you leave Richmond?"

"I met my uncle one day, it was in summer, and I sat on one of the benches in the park; he was struck by my resemblance to his sister and asked me my name, I told him, and he said I was his niece. I told him a little of my life, all of it in fact but our marriage, and he asked me to leave Richmond and be his child; he thought there'd be a difficulty with Miss Stone, so I went then, just as I was. I wondered if you would spare a regret for me when you heard of my loss."

"I never heard of it until a month ago."

"Well, I went abroad. I saw everything worth seeing in France and Germany, and I came home to go through a London season."

"And broke half a dozen hearts meanwhile. Mab, how could you keep true to me through it all?"

"I don't know," she whispered shyly; "I always longed for your return. I fancied if I only met you under another name, as a stranger, my scheme must succeed. Do you know, Kenneth, I never thought of failure; I believe I did not dare."

"And Bee?"

"Bee knew nothing; I was afraid to tell her. Kenneth, tell me one thing, have I succeeded, are you sorry we missed the train that night long ago?"

"My darling, I am sorry for nothing that gave you to me, but I shall never quite forgive myself for all those years of neglect and unkindness."

Her bright head rested on his shoulder, as though it had found its true home at last; Kenneth took his first kisses from his wife's lips, and wondered with an intense thankfulness at his happiness.

"And when are you coming to Vernon?"

She shook her head.

"Don't you know, young lady," he said lightly, "you promised four years ago to have a very particular regard for my wishes; well, this is a very important wish, I want my wife."

"I don't feel as if I was really that at all. Kenneth, don't you think we could be married over again, and have a wedding-cake and a honeymoon, like other people?"

"The wedding cake and the honeymoon by all means, my darling, but I'm afraid we can't be married again."

Of course the General had to be told, and very perplexed and troubled he looked as he listened.

"I always meant Mab to be married at St. George's, in white satin and pearls," he observed, complainingly. "I've brought pearls from India fit for a queen."

The pearls and the white satin, like the wedding-cake, might be enjoyed in the future, but this much was certain, they could never grace the bridal of Elena Mabel, Countess of Vernon.

It was publicly announced that Miss Olive would go abroad in December for the benefit of her health, and before she had been gone a fortnight the news came over the sea that she had married the Earl of Vernon.

To this day Kenneth and Mabel rarely allude to their wedding day, and very few people know that it dates from four years previous to their honeymoon.

All speculations as to the suddenness of the match, all surprise at its secrecy, had been forgotten when the Earl and Countess returned in May to take up their abode at Vernon Castle, there to continue through all the years of their wedded life that firm affection and friendship for the master and mistress of Normanhurst which existed during that memorable visit when Mab fought so hard for the prize she still declares was worth struggling for, and which, after long waiting she won at last.

[THE END.]

FACETIE.

LADY: "How is this insect powder to be applied?" Assistant (absent-mindedly): "Give 'em a teaspoonful after each meal, madam."

HE: "You want to know what I'd be were it not for your money?" SHE: "Yes, I do." HE: "A bachelor."

MRS. K. LAMITY (hoarsely): "Murder! Thieves! Help!" B. URGYER: "Mum, you've got an awful cold; why don't you do sumfin fer it?"

HE: "By Jove! you know, upon my word, if I were to see a ghost, you know, I would be a chattering idiot for the rest of my life." SHE: "Haven't you seen a ghost?"

"WHERE you moved by her music?" "Yes; it amounted to that. I think we should have kept the flat for another year if it hadn't been for her."

REGGY: "It costs an awful lot to dress like a gentleman, don't you know?" Miss Becky Sharpe: "Yes, you're wise to save your money."

A COUNTRY bridegroom, when the bride hesitated to pronounce the word "obey," remarked to the officiating clergyman: "Go on, minister—it don't matter; I can make her!"

LITTLE BOY: "That lady gave me some candy." Mother: "I hope you were polite about it." "Oh yes." "What did you say?" "I said I wished pa had met her before he got 'quainted with you."

MARY: "Why weren't you asked to the Van Noodle reception?" Janet: "Mrs. Van Noodle said my complexion would clash with the new wall-paper."

WHITE: "I declare I begin to feel that I am growing old. It's really unpleasant." Hubby: "Yes, dear, it must be especially so for one who has been young so long!"

"Yes, sir," said the shopman, briskly, "we have lace of all kinds. Would you like to see Valenciennes or point lace?" "It's a shoelace I want," explained the customer.

"ELIA," said Marion, as they were seated on the verandah of their country house, "I went fishing with Charles this morning." "Did you? What did you catch?" "I caught Charles."

JIMSON (proudly): "I never deceive my wife—no, sir; I tell her everything." Bilson: "Yes, I knew that long ago." "Wha—how?" "She tells it all to my wife, and my wife tells it to me."

LITTLE DICK: "What are you cutting out of that paper?" Little Johnny: "Something I don't want mamma to see." "What is it?" "It's a article wot says wooden slippers from Holland are coming into fashion."

SHE (a woman's rights woman): "Do you believe that women should have the right of being the equal of man?" He: "Well, if she wants to let herself down so far I don't see any reason why she should be prevented."

"THE idea of a business man sending a letter with a P.S.," said Chollie. "Dooce! bad form, surely," replied Chappie. "But that isn't the worst of it," said Chollie. "In this case it means 'Please Settle.'"

"How do you like your new music master?"

"He is a very nice, polite young man. When I made a mistake yesterday, he said, 'Pray, mademoiselle, why do you take so much pains to improve upon Beethoven!'"

FIRST EXCITED ARGUER: "Are you calling me a liar?" No. 2 ditto: "Well, my remarks, I confess, are fairly open to that interpretation." F. E. A. (mollified): "By Jove, sir, you got in your apology just in time!"

WATTS: "There are two broken-hearted chappies in two offices down my way." Potts: "And why?" Watts: "They have been flirting with each other across the street for a week from their windows. Each thought the other was a girl."

INSTRUCTOR IN LATIN: "Miss B., of what was Ceres the goddess?" Miss B.: "She was the goddess of marriage." Instructor: "Oh, no, of agriculture." Miss B. (looking perplexed): "I am sure my book says she was the goddess of husbandry."

At a meeting of a certain town council an alderman complained of the absence of one of the councillors. "Sir," exclaimed a councillor, indignantly, "you ought to have made that complaint when he was present to answer for himself."

GUS: "Why does Cholly walk so lopsided?" Algy: "He has been in the habit of wearing his hair parted in the middle for the past seven years, and has just adopted the fashion of wearing it parted on the side, and it seems to have knocked him off his balance."

TEDDY: "I wish I hadn't licked Jimmy Brown this morning." Mamma: "You see how wrong it was, don't you, dear?" TEDDY: "Yes, 'cause I didn't know till afterwards that his mother was going to give a Christmas party."

YOUNG WIFE: "Oh, mamma, put my curling-irons on the fire, quick! Charlie has been bitten by a mad dog!" Mother: "Are you going to cauterise the wound?" Young Wife: "No; but I want to curl my hair, so that I can run for the doctor. Do be quick!"

MRS. DOOLEY (whose husband is out of work): "Sure it's the continted woman you should be, Mrs. Mooney, wid yer husband wid a job as night watchman at the warehouse." Mrs. Mooney (excitedly): "Continted, is it? An' that warehouse full of open collar-flaps! An' him walks in his sleep!"

PAT (relating his marvellous optical operation to admiring group): "Thin the docther takes me eyes out and puts thim on the table." Doubtful Auditor: "How d'ye know that, Pat?" Pat (hotly): "Whisht, ye spalpeen! Wam't I lookin' at thim lyin' there wid me own eyes?"

"You are a chemist and druggist, are you?" "I am." "Been in the business a number of years?" "I have." "Understand your trade thoroughly?" "I do." "Registered?" "Yes, sir." "That is your certificate hanging over there?" "It is." "Well, give me twopenny-worth of tooth-powder!"

TRAMP (to citizen who has given him a penny for a night's lodging): "If you give me one more penny, sir, I can get a bed all to myself." Citizen: "No, I can't do that; but here is a suggestion. You ask the gentleman you are to sleep with for an additional penny. He ought to be willing to give it gladly."

LADY: "This house would suit me, but there are not enough closets." Landlord: "The number can easily be doubled." Lady: "Very well, then, I'll sign the lease." Landlord (half-an-hour later): "George, send a carpenter to that house to divide each of those closets into two."

"I HOPE, Alice," said Mrs. Bongton, the proud mother of the accomplished girl graduate, "I hope that you addressed that French count in his native tongue. What did he say to you in reply?" "Oh," replied Alice, "he apologised, and said he was sorry, but he understood nothing but French."

A CANDIDATE addressing his constituents said: "Some persons hold the opinion that just at the precise moment one human being dies another is born, and the soul enters and animates the newborn babe. Now I have made particular inquiries concerning my opponent, and I find that for some hours before he drew breath nobody but a donkey died."

OLD GENTLEMAN (bursting into tears): "Waiter, it's no use trying. I ca-can't eat this fowl." Waiter: "Why? What ever's the matter, sir?" Old Gentleman: "Why, I knew this fowl when I was a lit-little boy! It used to fee-feed out of my hand, and I lov-loved it! Ta-take it away, waiter, and bur-bury it decently!"

ARE you still troubled by your neighbour's chickens?" asked one man of another. "Not a bit," was the answer. "They are kept shut up now." "How did you manage it?" "Why, every night I put a lot of eggs in the grass under one of the bushes in the garden, and every morning, when my neighbour was looking, I went out and brought them in."

"DID you ever see such horrid weather as this?" he exclaimed in dismay. "No," she answered, "I have no hesitation in saying that I never did. Weather, you know, is one of the intangible things which cannot possibly make an impression on the human eye. It is an agglomeration of atmospheric conditions, which, while they may be accompanied by visible phenomena, cannot themselves be subject to optical perception." Then he realized that he was talking to a girl who had taken a university degree in science.

An old woman of a thrifty turn of mind lives in a village far away from any town. Some time ago her husband lay very ill and the doctor had said he had not more than a week to live. The old lady had to go to town to have her husband's medicine put up, and thinking it would save her a second long journey, she took the opportunity of buying the cake and wine for the apparently inevitable funeral. On her return home the dying husband interrogated her thus: "What did ye get in th' toon, 'umman?" "I got yer medicine made up." "An' what else?" inquired the invalid. "Weel," hesitatingly, "as it's sae far to toon, I thoct I micht as weel buy the cake and wine for the funeral." "Gie's a taste, lass." She cut a piece of cake and gave him a glass of wine. He liked them so much that he asked for more, and finally consuming all the cake and wine he—recovered.

SOCIETY.

THERE are two large advertising agencies in London, the members of both firms being women, and all their employes women.

THERE will be two Drawing Rooms at Buckingham Palace before Easter, which will be held for the Queen by either the Princess of Wales or Princess Christian.

HEREDITARY Prince Alfred seems to be quite outgrowing his constitutional weakness. He is now in his twenty-first year, and will celebrate his majority in October next.

THE Queen is to be accompanied to the Continent at the end of March by Princess Beatrice and Prince Henry of Battenberg, and will be attended by the Dowager Lady Churchill, Sir Henry Ponsonby, Colonel Bigge, the Munshi Abdul Karim, Dr. Reid, and a maid-of-honour.

In the spring Osborne House is to be enlarged by the addition of a number of bedrooms and two bath-rooms. The plans for the work have been submitted to the Queen, who has expended a great deal of money on the place during the past few years, as the cost of the new Indian Room alone exceeded £25,000.

THE announcement that the Queen's continental visit next spring is to be to Nice has given great satisfaction there. Many things may occur to prevent Her Majesty's plans being carried out, but already preparations are being set on foot to render Her Majesty's visit agreeable and comfortable. The Queen has not entered France since her visit to Hyères in 1892, having gone to Florence both last year and in 1891 by the Flushing and St. Gothard route. She will travel to the Riviera by the Western of France and Paris, Lyons, and Mediterranean lines, starting from Cherbourg, and passing round Paris by the circular railway. Her Majesty will not leave for the Continent until March 26th at the earliest, so that her arrival at Nice will take place just a fortnight later than the date which has been mentioned in the daily papers.

The Queen will probably hold a Court at Buckingham Palace about February 27th for the reception of the Diplomatic Corps, the Ministers and ex-Ministers, and a limited number of "the high nobility" and personages of light and leading in their various vocations. Invitations for this function will be issued by the Lord Chamberlain from a list which has been submitted to the Queen for her approval, and no name will be on it which has not been sanctioned by Her Majesty.

THE Empress of Russia is an active philanthropist and a rigid economist. She cares but little about dancing, and still less about pretty frocks, but she does care about playing the rôle of Good Samaritan, and is never so happy as when on a mission of mercy, looking after and comforting the desolate and oppressed. Such a Czaritsa, enjoying over her husband the influence which Empress Alexandra does, ought to and will accomplish glorious reforms in that vast and unhappy Empire.

THE Queen has given instructions for Lord Cromer, Her Majesty's Plenipotentiary in Egypt, to do everything in his power for the comfort of Her Majesty the Dowager Empress of Russia during her forthcoming visit. The general officer commanding Her Majesty's troops at Cairo, and the Sirdar of the Egyptian Army have also been apprised of the approaching visit of Empress Dagmar Marie Feodorovna, who is timed to arrive at Alexandria, accompanied by the Grand Duke George and a large retinue, on Sunday, the 20th of this month.

THE Princess of Wales is anxious to be back in England for the anniversary of the fatal 14th, which robbed her of her beloved eldest-born. Her separation from her bereaved sister will, however, under any circumstances, be but a temporary one, as according to present arrangements the Dowager Empress of Russia will arrive in England tolerably early in the new year. The calm and freedom of the life at Sandringham and the distractions afforded by the coming and going of visitors to York Cottage should do much towards alleviating the depression from which the Empress has so severely suffered.

STATISTICS.

It is estimated that about 250,000,000 bricks are used monthly in the United Kingdom.

ON a rough average 45,000 sovereigns pass over the Bank of England counters every day.

QUEEN VICTORIA rules 11,475,054 square miles of the earth's territory, and 378,725,857 of its population.

THE pay of a Russian Army officer is very small. A full general gets from £300 to £400 a year in our money, according to the length of service; a lieutenant-general from £235 to £350; a major-general from £156 to £280; and a colonel commanding a three-battalion regiment, 2,400 strong, gets £120.

THE greatest degrees of cold ever recorded in England were 16 degrees below zero at London on Christmas Day, 1796; and, strange to say, 20 below zero at Torquay on Christmas Day, 1860. It is very curious that the place which has the reputation of being one of the warmest in England should have registered the coldest day.

GEMS.

OUR own hearts, and not other men's opinions of us, form our true honour.

ONE ungrateful man does an injury to all who stand in need of aid.

ROUGHNESS is a needless cause of discontent. Severity breedeth fear, but roughness breedeth hate. Even reproof from authority ought to be grave, and not taunting.

ALL the world, all that we are and all that we have—our bodies and our souls, our actions and our sufferings, our conditions at home, our accidents abroad, our many sins and our seldom virtues—are so many arguments to make our souls dwell low in the deep valley of humility.

LET us cherish sympathy. By attention and exercise it may be improved in every man. It prepares the mind for receiving the impressions of virtue, and without it there can be no true politeness. Nothing is more odious than that insensibility which wraps a man up in himself and his own concerns, and prevents his being moved with either the joys or sorrows of another.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

LEMON BUTTER.—Half pound sugar, two ounces butter, three eggs, rind and juice of one large lemon. Put butter, sugar, eggs, the rind grated, and the juice of the lemon strained, into a bright saucepan; stir all over the fire till like honey, and just boiling; pour into a jar and keep in a cool place for use; have paste baked on patty pans and cool; fill with preserve and serve.

TRIFLES.—One quart of flour, one cup of sugar, two tablespoonfuls melted butter, one egg, two teaspoonfuls baking powder sifted with the flour, and enough sweet milk to make stiff as crullers. Roll into thin sheets and cut in pieces about two by four inches. Make as many cuts across the short way as possible. Pass two knitting needles under every other strip. Spread the needles as far apart as possible, and with them hold the trifles in the fat until a light brown.

CHUTNEY.—This is a good sauce for cold meat. One pound apples, one ounce salt, half ounce chillies, half pound sugar, two ounces tamarinds, half ounce garlic, half ounce ground ginger, one ounce shalots, two ounces mustard seed, quarter pound raisins chopped, one and a half breakfast cups vinegar; peel and chop the apples, boil them quite soft in the vinegar and turn out to cool; chop up finely the chillies, the garlic, and shalots, add everything when the apples are cool, stir; put in bottles near the fire for a few days, then cork.

MISCELLANEOUS.

IN Murano, a small island near Venice, over half the entire population work at glass-making.

IN Japan the flute is played only by men of 5.

THE Chinese have a god for every disease, even for childhood's afflictions like the mumps and measles.

PAPER from seaweed is a growing industry in France. It is so transparent that it has been used in place of glass for windows.

HARROW has a record which no other public school can boast, in that it has produced five prime ministers during the present century.

In the public schools of France 24.2 per cent. of the pupils are shortsighted, of Germany thirty-five per cent., and of the United Kingdom twenty per cent. Lack of exercise seems the chief cause.

RUSSIAN girls thus learn their matrimonial prospects: A number of them take off their rings and conceal them in a basket of corn; then a hen is brought in and invited to partake of the corn, and the owner of the first ring uncovered will be the first to enter matrimony.

ALUMINUM is finding numerous uses in military equipments. The latest is the experiment introduced into the Austro-Hungarian army, where the heavy musical instruments, trombones, horns, etc., usually made of brass, have given way to those manufactured of the new metal.

THE English walnut is said to be the most profitable of all nut-bearing trees. When in full bearing they will yield about 300lb. of nuts to the tree. The nuts sell on an average at about 4d. per lb. If only twenty-seven trees are planted on an acre the income would be about £135 per acre.

WOOD-PULP paper is made very rapidly in these days. The standing tree is cut down, sawed into blocks, fed into the pulp-mill, and submitted to the usual process. In about eight hours after the tree is cut down the finished paper is sometimes on its way to the office of some daily newspaper.

IN Sweden great advantages result from the fact that the young men who are going to farm their own land, or to make a livelihood by farming, learn their profession at one of the two State Agricultural Colleges, just as future soldiers and sailors learn their profession at the State Naval and Military Colleges.

A NEW kind of paving material, composed of coir fibre, which is obtained from the husk of a coconut mixed with bitumen, is to be introduced. It is said to be impervious to moisture, and to give a sure foot-hold for horses. Durability and inexpensiveness are two strong recommendations in its favour.

A STRANGE tree has been found in the French Settlements on the Gaboon River in Africa, which quite eclipses the bread fruit, and almost realises Lowell's whim of a tree bearing buttered muffins. It is called the bread-and-butter tree, and it yields both a thick and fatty substance called coo-ray, which is an excellent substitute for butter, and a grain from which very nutritious bread is made.

It is said that the Japanese practise refined cruelty to delight their palates. They believe that the fish called the dai is the most delicious when eaten alive. An expert Japanese carver can dexterously remove five-sixths of the edible matter from its bones without touching a vital part. During this cruel operation the fish is kept alive by wet sea-weed, which, being placed over its gills, enables it to breathe.

A NEW monument to Garibaldi, and perhaps the finest in Italy, is to be erected in Rome next September. It is to stand on the Janiculum Hill opposite the dome of St. Peter's. It is said that there is not a town in Italy, or even a populous village, that does not contain statues of Victor Emmanuel and Garibaldi. The great monument to Victor Emmanuel now in course of erection on the Capitoline Hill will have cost five million dollars when completed.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

SAM.—No species of tree so named.

J. C.—See answer given to "A. R. G."

S. B.—You must get it laquered again.

INQUISITIVE.—Tiffin is an East Indian term.

VALERIE.—Keep the ventilator shut for cakes.

HARRY.—The dog must be tied up or kept indoors.

ANXIOUS.—We have no knowledge of the competition.

TIMOTHY.—It would be impossible to hear without a drum to ear.

JANE.—Holly is sold in most fruiterers' shops about this time.

JAMES WILLIAM.—Not without residence for the qualifying period.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—St. Pancras, London, is the largest railway station in Britain.

S. J.—You would still have present rate to pay except you sub-let it.

WORKING MAN'S WIFE.—Milk is the most valuable of all liquid diets.

BETA.—The frequent use of oil and brandy tends to darken the hair.

X. Y.—Beaumont died at thirty in 1616, the same year as Shakespeare.

INCOG.—It derived its name from the Fleet river, which ran by the side of it.

SANDY.—Cromwell's defeat of the Scots under Leslie took place on 3rd September, 1650.

UNCLE TOM.—Slaves were openly bought and sold in England up to the year 1772.

FOREIGNER.—There is no place in England where you could obtain the information.

ALICIA.—It would be against rules to comply with your request.

WINDY.—The mandoline is constructed on the same principle as the violin.

A. B. C.—Your only chance would be a diligent search at second-hand book shops.

MINTA.—A simple remedy for hicough is a lump of sugar saturated with vinegar.

ROSEALINE.—The involuntary blushing arises simply from a native modesty of character.

OLD READER.—You have to pay all the rates you note.

ADOLPHUS.—Apprentice blacksmiths are not taken into the navy; only experienced workmen are wanted.

ROBBIE.—We advise you to stick to your trade and develop your artistic taste in your leisure hours.

NITA.—When the oven is too hot the temperature may be reduced by putting in a pan of cold water.

A CONSTANT READER.—We have not the information by us.

AN OLD SOLDIER.—Yes, write to the Registrar of Births and Deaths, Somerset House, London, who will furnish you with the particulars required.

IN WANT OF ADVICE.—It is impossible for us to estimate the amount of capital you would require to work the business.

MOLLIE.—"Breathes there a man"—is from the introduction to one of the cantos of Scott's "Lay of the Last Minstrel."

AGNES.—Wash it in tepid water with melted soap in it and the ammonia; it will require three waters of the same kind.

B. K.—It is only men who joined the army prior to 1860 who are entitled to a pension under the conditions you name.

A FATHER.—All that is necessary to obtain the release of the young man is to pay the £18 and the price of his passage home.

INQUIRE.—A doctor is not legally bound to attend any one when called upon; he does so in his own interest when he responds to the appeal.

INTERFERED.—It is absolutely necessary that you should hold broker's license if you are to deal in second-hand furniture, no matter where bought.

LITTLE HOUSEWIFE.—Burning whisky or brandy over a plum pudding is out of fashion; make a nice sauce with an egg in it, and pour it round in the dish.

M. L.—Tenant is not entitled to recover compensation for "improvements" made upon property to suit himself, and without permission of the owner.

ONE IN TROUBLE.—See a doctor and let him inquire very closely into all the facts ascertainable; he might be able to put his finger upon some cause which is not apparent to you.

L. P.—The license you require is a pedlar's certificate, obtainable from the police, in the district where you have resided for at least a month, at a cost of five shillings.

Mrs. G.—To purify water with alum, use two grains of alum to a gallon of water. Dissolve the alum in a little hot water, which let stand for forty-eight hours, and then rack off.

PENELOPE.—Botton-stone and sweet oil, laid on and then rubbed off with a piece of flannel, and finally polished with soft leather, is the very best thing you can use for both purposes.

PHIL.—The average dates (taking one year with another) are as follows:—Winter, 21st December to 16th March; spring to 21st June; summer to 21st September; and autumn to 21st December.

LILLIAN.—If you feel at liberty to tell the young man the state of your mind, and he persists in his request, you have no choice but to release him; and as you are not eighteen, it may be well for you in the end.

INCREDULOUS.—Only one marble statue of the human figure with eye-lashes is known. It is the sleeping Ariadne, one of the gems of the Vatican, and was found in 1508.

PERPLEXED.—White is not a colour, or to be more strictly precise it is a condition in which all colours are so evenly balanced that none predominates, and the result is absolute absence of colour.

AMABEL.—Rub the pork over with plenty of salt and a little sugar mixed. Put it in a tub with salt in the bottom. Turn and rub daily, or twice a day, for two or three weeks, then hang up to dry.

LOST: MY BOY.

Lost! I have lost him.

Where did he go?

Lightly I clasped him,

How could I know

Out of my dwelling

He would depart—

Even as I held him

Close to my heart!

Lost! I have lost him,

Somewhere between

Schoolhouse and college

Last was he seen.

Lips full of whistling,

Curly-tangled hair;

Lost! I have lost him,

Would I knew where!

Lost! I have lost him.

Chester, my boy!

Picture book, story-book,

Marble and toy,

Stored in the attic,

Unless they lie

Why should I care so much?

Mothers, tell why!

Yes, he is gone from me;

Left me no sign,

Save that another

Calls himself mine.

Handsome and strong of limb,

Stately he is;

Knows things that I do not;

Who can it be?

Face like the father's face,

Eyes black as mine,

Step full of manly grace,

Voice masculine.

Yes, but the gold of life

Has one alloy;

Why does the mother-heart

Long for her boy?

Long for the mischievous

Quaver little chap,

Ignorant, questioning,

Held in my lap,

Freehman, so tall and wise,

Answer me this:

Where is the little boy

I used to kiss?

J. M.

BETTY.—Bleaching in the sun or air is by far the best—blue is no good. If you cannot do that, then put a little liquid chloride of lime in cold water, and let them lie in it all night. It will make them quite white.

C. K.—Grape-shot is a combination of small shot put into a thick canvas bag and corded strongly together, so as to form a kind of cylinder whose diameter is equal to that of the ball adapted to the cannon.

FASHIONABLE.—Gaudy gowning is never in good taste. While conforming to the prevailing modes to a certain extent, you can so vary them as to make them in harmony with the complexion and appropriate to the figure.

JULIAN.—Dragoman is an oriental word signifying interpreter. The prize dragoman at Constantinople, through whom the Sultan receives the communications of Christian ambassadors, is one of the most important officers.

INA.—Wash it in two waters of tepid soap and water, then rinse it in clean cold water. Then mix one teaspoonful of gum arabic melted with two breakfast cups cold water and one dessert spoon vinegar. Rinse in this, wring out, and fold, clap, and iron.

AMBITION.—Forward your MS. and in a note to the editor state your expectation to be paid if your contribution is inserted in his magazine. Should he publish your article it will of course, under these circumstances, be paid for.

OLIVE.—Penal servitude for life means, in judicial sentences, detention for twenty-one years. Penal servitude for the term of a man's natural life means detention until death, and good behaviour insures no remission of a portion of the sentence.

REBELLIOUS.—We advise you to give every possible weight to your father's wise suggestions, and endeavour to conquer your distaste for the profession he suggests. If it is incurable, your father will be the first to aid you in any other line that you may show a disposition to follow.

HAROLD.—In Scotland, as late as the sixteenth century, licenses for duelling were granted by the Crown. In fact, it formed a source of revenue. Death in a duel without license was murder. The first attempt to repress duelling in England is said to have been made in 1713.

LOYALIST.—Queen Victoria has now passed the record of Henry III., who ruled fifty-six years and twenty-nine days, and has reigned longer than any English sovereign save George III., who ruled from October 25th, 1760, to January 29th, 1820, a period of fifty-nine years and ninety-seven days.

P. P.—Rub the part on each side with yellow soap; then lay on a mixture of starch in cold water very thick; rub it well in, and expose to the sun and air till the stain is removed. If this is not the case, in two or three days rub that off and repeat the process. When dry, sprinkle with a little water.

MOYA.—There are certain eyes that are somewhat on the iridescent order. They show changing lights and shadows and some sea-green tints. There are many shades of green, some of them like the gray or silver-green of waves. These colour suggestions are greenish, hence the popular idea of green eyes.

WATTY.—The phrase, going tick, or as it sometimes runs, on tick, first originated among the operatives, who received advances during the week in the shape of the tickets or orders on certain shops, the amount of which was deducted on payment of their wages at the week's end. Thus ticket, or according to the approved cant abbreviation tick, became equivalent to trust.

REMY.—The Esquimaux, or Eskimos, are the most northerly of the American native tribes, occupying Greenland, Labrador, the shores of the Arctic Ocean, and the coast on the Pacific down to the peninsula of Alaska, and also a portion of the adjacent Asiatic coast. The name Esquimaux, applied to them by the Algonquins, means raw eaters.

REGULAR READER.—Use a cement or putty made of fine sand, litharge, plaster of Paris, and boiled linseed oil; make no more at a time than you are ready to deal with, say, in four hours' time; the following are the proportions:—Equal weight of fine sand, shake through muslin, litharge, and plaster of Paris; enough boiled oil to make a stiff paste.

UNTUTORED.—If you desire to foster the feeling for poetry by which you are animated, cultivate by study the laws of versification, the works of the best poets, observing carefully how they constructed their poems, their general choice of subjects, and their mode of treating them, by practice, by patience, and perseverance.

A. N.—It is true the colony is in an improving condition, but it is not likely to receive from the neighbouring Australian colonies all the labour it craves about for some time to come; by sending one penny stamp to Government Emigrants' Information Office, 31, Broadway, London, E.W., you will get the "New Zealand Handbook," also latest trade reports from the colony, gratis.

GRACIE.—Beat the yolks of ten eggs very light; then add a pound and a quarter of fine sugar beaten and sifted; whisk it well until you see it rise in bubbles, then add the whites of two eggs, well beaten, mix them well with the sugar and yolks, and put in the rims of three lemons grated. Shake in lightly three-quarters of a pound of flour, just before putting the cake into the oven. Bake it one hour.

LAURA.—Boil one pound of beef in two quarts of water until the essence is completely extracted from the meat. Strain the beef from the broth, and add to the broth one teaspoonful of sage. Boil it gently for one hour, but do not let the sage become too soft. Beat the yolks of two eggs with about half a cupful of cream, pour them into the soup-tureen, and then, by degrees, pour in the soup, stirring it gently.

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